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Exploring the Resilience in Female Sex Trafficking Victims

Petra Torri

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Exploring the Resilience in Female Sex Trafficking Victims

by

Petra Torri

A Dissertation Presented to the
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University
2020

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**Nova Southeastern University
Halmos College of Arts and Sciences**

This dissertation was submitted by Petra Torri under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Halmos College of Arts and Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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Dustin Delemere Berna, Ph.D.
Chair

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my twin daughters Alyssa Lee and Olivia Rae Jones Torri. May you grow into the strong, smart, and independent women who strive to be the change in the world they want to see in others. Without you I would not be the person I am today. This is for you my beautiful babies.

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Table of Content

List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Definition of Terms.....	viii
Abstract	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Background	2
Purpose, Problem Statement, and Research Questions.....	4
Theory	6
Nature of the Study	6
Significance.....	7
Limitations	8
Summary	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review	10
The Definition of Human Trafficking.....	10
The Definition of Resilience	12
Domestic Sex Trafficking	12
International Sex Trafficking	15
The Vulnerabilities of Human Trafficking Victims.....	16
Trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Stockholm Syndrome	24
The Recruitment Strategies	27
The Market for Sex Trafficking	29
Laws in the United States and Abroad.....	31

A Response to Human Trafficking – Training for First Responders, Nurses, and Social Workers	38
The National Human Trafficking Hotline.....	41
Treatment for Human Trafficking Victims.....	42
Theoretical Analysis - Liberal Feminism	43
Gaps in Existing Research	46
Chapter 3: Methodology	52
Role of the Researcher	53
Phenomenological Research Methodology.....	54
Participant Selection	56
Research Questions	59
Data Collection – Semi-Structured Interviews	59
Data Analysis	66
Epoché or Bracketing.....	67
Phenomenological Reduction	68
Imaginative Variation	69
Synthesis of Composite Textural and Composite Structural Description	70
Ethical Considerations	70
Validity, Reliability, and Quality Control.....	72
Chapter 4: Results	74
Participant Profiles.....	75
Participant 1	76
Participant 2	76

Participant 3	77
Participant 4	78
Participant 5	78
Participant 6	79
Participant 7	80
Participant 8	80
Participant 9	81
Theme 1- Recruitment	88
Age at the Time of Entry and Exit into Trafficking.....	90
Deception	92
Vulnerabilities	95
Theme 2 – Exploitation.....	102
Sexual Exploitation.....	103
Trapped	106
Theme 3 - Leaving the Trafficking Situation	114
Fear	115
Resources	117
Catalyst Experience	121
Theme 4 - Healing from the Trafficking Experience.....	124
Counseling	124
Fellowship.....	126
Spirituality.....	128
Helping Others	131

Theme 5 - Substance Abuse.....	135
Drugs and Alcohol	136
Relapse and Falling back into that Life	140
Summary	143
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations.....	147
Discussion of the Findings.....	150
Theme 1 - Recruitment	151
Theme 2 - Exploitation	154
Theme 3 - Leaving the Trafficking Situation	157
Theme 4 - Healing from the Trafficking Experience.....	162
Theme 5 - Substance Abuse.....	169
Limitations	172
Recommendations for Future Research	173
Individual Methodology – A Lack of Conflict Resolution Skills and a Lack of Purpose	175
Contributions to the Field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution.....	179
Personal Reflection of the Researcher	180
Conclusion	181
References.....	183
Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Consent to Conduct Study	199
Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Letters.....	201
Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer.....	202
Appendix D: Consent Form.....	203

Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol	207
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List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics	83
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List of Figures

Figure 1. ACE Pyramid.....	19
Figure 2. Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts.....	20
Figure 3. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs	21
Figure 4. Sigmund Freud’s Levels of Consciousness	22
Figure 5. Data Analysis Using the Phenomenological Model.....	66
Figure 6. Emerging Themes and Emerging Sub-themes	86
Figure 7. Thematic Coding Mind Map	87

Definition of Terms

ACE = Adverse Childhood Experience

DHS = Department of Homeland Security

EBSQO = Research Data Base

FOSTA = Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act

ICE = Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency

IPA = Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

JVTA = Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act

TVPA = Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000

PROQUEST = Research Data Base

PTSD = Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

SESTA = Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act

STD = Sexually Transmitted Disease

USCIS = U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

VAWA = Violence Against Women Act

Abstract

This phenomenological study is aimed at exploring the resilience of human trafficking victims. More specifically, this research study focuses on the experience of female sex trafficking victims through the lens of practitioners who work with them. By understanding the causes that make females vulnerable to be recruited by traffickers, the way they get exploited, as well as how they are able to leave the trafficking situation, this dissertation provides an understanding about the factors that promote healing and resiliency from the trafficking experience. Feminist theory was used to illuminate existing literature on the subject, and data analysis was conducted using the transcendental phenomenological model. The findings provided insight into how the resilience of female sex trafficking victims is predominant in victims who received one-on-one counseling, who joined fellowships and support groups, as well as how the concepts of spirituality facilitate their healing and allows them to make sense of their trafficking experience. Once sex trafficking victims transitioned from being victims to survivors, helping and supporting other victims provides them with a higher purpose in life and their trafficking experience becomes a story of hope that can help other victims and inspire them to change their lives. They may also choose to use their experience to teach practitioners in the field, contribute to public policies, and towards the greater good of society. These findings are consistent with the achievement of the highest level of happiness according to Spitzer's levels of happiness theory.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Over the last couple years, human trafficking has been a continues story on the national news. Sex trafficking has received a lot of attention over the past two years, as several cases of sex trafficking in South Florida have made the news and hit close to home. In early 2019, sex trafficking in Jupiter, Florida, has made national news because one of the johns charged with soliciting prostitution was the owner of the New England Patriots Football team, Robert Kraft (Jeong, 2019). On another occasion, the case of Jeffrey Epstein caused public outcry, when Jeffrey Epstein was arrested on July 6, 2019, on charges of sex trafficking and conspiracy to sex trafficking. The arrest occurred over 10 years after he signed a plea agreement in 2008, in Miami, Florida, in which he was charged with sex crimes involving minors (Selby, 2019). Surprisingly, Epstein's co-defendant and accomplice in the sex trafficking ring he ran in South Florida, New York, London, and the Bahamas among other foreign countries, was his girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell, a British socialite. Among the those who are accused to have engaged in the sexual abuse of the minor girls are many of the rich and famous, the elite and even British royals. Former presidents, as well as the current president are known to have been close friends with Epstein but then distanced themselves real fast from Epstein after he was arrested once again on charges of sex trafficking in 2019. While Jeffrey Epstein died of suicide in his jail cell shortly after his arrest, his girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell was on the run ever since and was only just recently arrested and kept in a jail in New York, pending

trial in July 2021. With Maxwell's arrest, many of the rich and famous, as well as the elite and royalty may face charges (Gordon-Logan et al, 2020).

This type of news headlines often tends to not let us forget that there is still an ongoing problem across the country that involves sex trafficking, and the sex trafficking of minors. While it was public outcry that forced lawmakers to pass the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, as well as the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) of 2015, among other federal and state laws that enables law enforcement to increasingly charge and prosecute human traffickers, the problem of human trafficking, in particular sex trafficking still exists. Despite the laws that have been passed, we see prominent examples like Robert Kraft and Jeffrey Epstein. It is these cases, that remind us that that sex trafficking can take place in our own neighborhoods and by prominent figures we see on TV or in magazines.

Background

In the past decade, there has been an increased number of scholarly articles and research studies conducted on human trafficking as the problem became more public. When hearing about human trafficking, it is usually in connection with social justice; we hear about human trafficking from survivors who tell their stories, or from those who would like to influence policy. Human trafficking is known to be a form of slavery that has made increased news across the country in the past two decades. According the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2019), the definition for human trafficking is the following:

Human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act. Every year, millions of men, women, and

children are trafficked worldwide – including right here in the United States. It can happen in any community and victims can be any age, race, gender, or nationality. Traffickers might use violence, manipulation, or false promises of well-paying jobs or romantic relationships to lure victims into trafficking situations (p. 1).

In addition, the number of the national human trafficking hotline comes up first when entering human trafficking on a search on the internet (National Human Trafficking Hotline, 2019). It seems that awareness about the problem has been created, and help is easily accessible. Therefore, one can assume it would be quite easy for victims of human trafficking to get help, given the fact that help is only a phone call away? However, the reality is different. Many victims of human trafficking, and in particular sex trafficking are trapped in that life for many years, and even their children are born into that life. Female victims frequently lose their children to the traffickers, or they do not make it out altogether. Some turn to becoming traffickers and recruiters themselves in order to escape the daily sexual exploitation (Hughes, 2001). But there are also many sex trafficking victims who are able to break free from that life, and these are the ones who become the survivors.

The majority of the population finds it difficult to understand how victims of sex trafficking can be manipulated to the degree that they become unaware that they are victims of human trafficking. It is important to understand that lifestyle and economic needs are not the only factors that can make girls and women vulnerable to traffickers. Leaving the trafficking situation not only takes courage, but also the strength to deal with the underlying reasons that made victims vulnerable to traffickers in the first place.

As described in chapter 2, many victims have psychological reasons that make them vulnerable to traffickers. From existing trauma and abuse, these are the factors that make victims vulnerable to traffickers. Then once trafficked, Stockholm syndrome, which is a psychological condition in which victims fall for their perpetrator and develop a “bond” or even trauma bond makes it hard for victims to leave that life (Polaris, 2019). These underlying reason make it also more difficult for the victims to develop the emotional strength to face and heal these issues in the recovery process.

Purpose, Problem Statement, and Research Questions

This research study aims to discover and explore the factors that lead to resilience in sex trafficking victims. Previous research studies in the field have mainly focused on researching the factors that make victims human trafficking prey for traffickers, as well as the recruiting strategies of traffickers. Further, research has been conducted on the way human trafficking victims are getting trafficked into and moved within the country. Researchers also focused on exploring the types of environments the victims get exploited in, and the factors that enable human trafficking. Country conditions including corruption and a lack of laws that have been put in place or laws that do not get enforced have been explored. Also, the national response to human trafficking, as well as the international response to human trafficking have been addressed in previous research studies. However, not a whole lot of emphasis has been placed on researching the resilience in human trafficking victims, their ability to move on with their lives after they get out of the trafficking situation and their ability to bounce back from this experience. Also the factors that contribute to victims becoming survivors and not fall back into getting re-trafficked have not been addressed much in previous research. It is important to

explore the factors that internally and externally contribute to the survival and recovery of sex trafficking victims. This research study is going to address exactly that. What is it that allows some victims of human trafficking to get the courage to escape their situation, versus others, who become traffickers or recruiters themselves as a way to work themselves out of being sexually exploited? We cannot assume that all victims of sex trafficking want out of that life, or are even aware that they are victims of sex trafficking. However, what exactly is it that makes the difference for those who are able to break free from that life? Is it an internal process or are there external factors that have led these victims of sex trafficking to leave their situation and become survivors of sex trafficking? Should it turn out that these factors are external factors, is there a way to bring these factors to victims who are currently trapped in this life? Is there anything that can be done when assisting them in their recovery that would promote healing in particular?

My research study is trying to explore the answers to the above stated questions with the following research questions:

- What are the factors that keep victims of human traffickers in their trafficking situation before they break free from their trafficker?
- What are the factors that enable victims of sex trafficking to break free from the trafficking situation?
- What were the perceptions of participants regarding the decision of sex trafficking victims to break away from the trafficker? If so, of what nature?
- What are the factors that contribute to female sex trafficking survivor's healing from the experience of getting trafficked?

Theory

Liberal Feminist theory was chosen to explain the problem of sex trafficking of females. Liberal Feminist theory explains human trafficking and in particular sex trafficking by suggesting, traffickers are mainly men, who suppress their victims who are to a great extent women. Historically, women have always been suppressed by men in many areas of life, but this suppression is and has been much more severe abroad in other countries than it is in the United States. The reason why females are vulnerable to traffickers who are mostly men is often a history of abuse or neglect at home. Some of the American children who become trafficking victims are runaways or are in the foster system, having lived with various foster families and have never been used to living in a stable family environment. Pimps and traffickers then use strategies in which they provide the victims with “pseudo families” or at the minimum guarantee them a roof over their head (Mirfenderski, 2017). Internationally trafficked victims are often on the search for a better life in the United States; they try to escape poverty or a lack of employment in their home country and are promised employment abroad, such as nanny jobs or waitress jobs. Then once they arrive at their destination they realized that not only are they not placed in the job they were promised, but often they are faced with having to work off the debt they incurred allowing the traffickers transport them into the United States (Siskin & Sun Wyler, 2013).

Nature of the Study

Transcendental phenomenology as a research method was chosen, as the research study focuses on the shared lived experience of practitioners who experienced a phenomenon. The data was collected via semi-structured phone, Face-Time, or Skype

interviews, and the goal was to recruit between a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 15 participants for this study. The participants were recruited via email and then spread the word over my study to fellow practitioners they know, mostly via email, who then received information about my study also via email. After interviewing 9 practitioners, the data was saturated, and no new information emerged, so the researcher stopped collecting more data.

Significance

The similarities in experiences of the victims were analyzed. What do victims of sex trafficking have in common that allows them to recover from victimhood and become survivors of sex trafficking? Whether it is an internal strength, survival instinct, religion, a belief in a god or a higher power, or external factors that enable victims of sex trafficking to break free from that life and recover; this study explored the uncovered aspects of human trafficking with the hope that the findings will serve those, who work with the victim populations. By exploring the factors that contribute to the resilience of sex trafficking victims and survivors, people who regularly work with human trafficking victims and are aware of the findings of this study may be able to implement them into their approach when working with the victim populations. Implementing these factors may influence the recovery process of victims they encounter as far as promote resiliency within them. The goal is to serve practitioners who help these victims on their recovery process.

Previous research placed a lot of emphasis on why victims of human trafficking become victims, and the factors that make them vulnerable to traffickers. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962) suggests that there are 5 levels within his pyramid,

of which the needs lower in the hierarchy must be met prior to meeting the ones higher up. The needs start at the bottom with physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization on top. In order for an individual to be able to achieve the stage of self-actualization, the basic needs on the bottom of the pyramid must be met first. Victims of human trafficking lack those basic needs. However, the literature review of this study explains the vulnerabilities of human trafficking victims with more than just Maslow's model (1962), that suggests victims' lack physiological needs, safety, or love and belonging and traffickers use these unmet needs for recruitment purposes. After victims exited that life, they still have to overcome these unmet needs.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were mainly that there are different female sex trafficking populations, and of the 9 participants, there were several participants who had not been exposed to all victim populations equally. Three of the participants worked with a variety of female victims of sex trafficking, while the remaining 6 worked with more specific populations, such as for example underage girls who were incarcerated, women who are homeless, or females with substance abuse issues. By asking a limited amount of follow up questions in addition to following the interview protocol, the researcher undertook efforts to mitigate any biases while still being able to collect the most insightful data, and extract the true experiences of the subject matter experts beyond any superficial responses.

Another limitation of the study was that due to the way the semi-structured interviews were conducted. The researcher was unable to analyze any data beyond auditory data in all interviews since the interviews were conducted via phone as per the

preference of the participants. One participant requested to conduct the interview via FaceTime. Auditory data excludes body language and facial expressions. Those would have provided more clues into the lived experiences of the participants.

Summary

This study explores the resilience in female sex trafficking victims and identified the factors that influence the ability to bounce back from the experience of getting trafficked and exploited in the commercial sex industry. Additionally, the researcher also explored the conflict the participants encountered when working with this vulnerable population. The data that was collected was collected via semi-structured interviews that took place via phone and except with 1 participant who chose FaceTime as the method to conduct the interview. Nine subject matter experts participated in this study, demonstrating how their knowledge and experience contributes to research in the field of human trafficking. The data collected and analyzed led to the identification of 5 key themes and 19 sub-themes. A review of the existing literature in the field of human trafficking is conducted in chapter 2, which will also demonstrate a research gap in the existing literature on the topic and the need for this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Literature review consists of multiple sections. In order to gain an overview about the topic, and determine where we as a society stand in regards to research, knowledge, and awareness about human trafficking and sex trafficking, the researcher used search engines, such as PROQUEST, and EBSCO, and input keywords, such as *“sex trafficking, international sex trafficking, domestic sex trafficking, and resilience”* among many other search engines and keywords regarding the topic. By analyzing the findings, the researcher provides the reader with an overview about human trafficking, and the different forms of human trafficking. Second, the vulnerabilities of human trafficking victims, the recruitment strategies traffickers use, and the type of market that makes trafficking lucrative to traffickers are discussed. In addition, the global response to human trafficking, as well as measures, laws, and training that have been put into place to combat human trafficking within the United States and abroad. Also, the researcher explains how to recognize human trafficking victims. Further, an overview of the problem from the perspective of liberal-feminist theory is provided. Last, gaps in existing research are discussed and how this research study contributes to the existing literature in the field, as well as recommendations for future research in the field are made.

The Definition of Human Trafficking

Human Trafficking, also called “trafficking in persons” and “modern day slavery” refers to involuntary slavery, servitude, debt bondage, forced labor, and commercial sex, and can include the movement of victims (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Currently, there are 91,416 trafficking cases accounted for around the globe; the victims are from 172 different countries and from 169 different nationalities. However, it seems that the

majority of human trafficking victims are either trafficked within the United States, or they are trafficked from a foreign country into the United States as the destination country. The majority of human trafficking victims are females, and the most common form of human trafficking is the trafficking for sexual exploitation (International Organization for Migration, 2018). Traffickers always exploit and enslave their victims who are unable to leave when they wish to leave. Traffickers always use coercive and deceptive practices to control their victims. The majority of trafficking victims are forced into the commercial sex industry, or are victims of forced labor (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Human Trafficking means modern day slavery – or the holding of a person in forced service. The word “Trafficking” can be confusing, as it implies that a victim is transported over a border, which is not always the case. A victim can also be kept in their own house (McGough, 2013). Human Trafficking takes the victim’s freedom and dignity. It can take on several forms, but is mainly distinguished between trafficking for labor and sex trafficking. Labor trafficking consists of victims not having the freedom to leave when they wish to leave, work without compensation, or work to pay off a debt that they incurred. Often this debt is the cost of trafficking the victim to their destination. Labor trafficking victims usually work in manufacture, domestic servitude, or agricultural settings. In addition, it is not uncommon for labor trafficking victims to work in the construction trade. Sex trafficking, like labor trafficking means the victims are not able to leave when they want to leave. However, sex trafficking victims are forced to work in the commercial sex industry (U.S. Department of State, 2019). For the purpose of this research, the focus is on sex trafficking of female victims. This researcher chose to write about the sex trafficking of females, because females make up the majority of sex

trafficking victims. Further, the researcher chose to have this study focus on sex trafficking, because it represents the method of human trafficking that appears to make the most news headlines across the country in the recent years, and in particular in South Florida, which is an area well known for human trafficking and in sex trafficking. In 2019, the average age of sex trafficking in the United States was 17 years old, and the average of labor trafficking victims in the United States is 22 years old (Polaris Project, 2020). There here are two types of sex trafficking: Domestic sex trafficking, and international sex trafficking. Both, domestic and international trafficking victims get exploited by the traffickers, and in both cases the victim is unable to leave the trafficking situation due to the consequences and due to fear that was instilled in the victims by their perpetrators.

The Definition of Resilience

The definition for “resilience” is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties, as well as toughness. According to Grothberg (1999), in the context of human trafficking, resilience refers to the ability to face, overcome, and change the painful experience of getting trafficked and exploited. It is the ability of human trafficking victims to see their experience as a life lesson (pp. 5-85). While some victims are able to leave, others are unable to break free, and some become recruiters or traffickers themselves. This ability to overcome their situation is known as the human trafficking victims’ resilience, and this study aims to explore the factors that contribute to this resilience.

Domestic Sex Trafficking

Domestic sex trafficking consists of the trafficking and exploitation of youth and children within the United States, and does not involve movement across the border.

Oftentimes, the victim is underage at the time of recruitment. When children become victims of traffickers, it is considered domestic minor sex trafficking. According to Shared Hope International (2007), domestic minor sex trafficking is “the commercial sexual abuse of children through buying, selling, or trading their sexual services” (p.1). The average age for American children to be recruited by traffickers is between the ages of 11 and 14 years old, with girls at average becoming victims between the age of 12 to 14, and boys and transgender becoming victims between the age of 11 and 13. However, some children are as young as 5 years old when they become trafficking victims (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004). Domestic trafficking consists of the recruitment of the victims domestically, who are lured in by traffickers with deceptive practices for the purpose of exploitation. Domestically trafficked victims are not trafficked over international borders (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

It is much harder to account for domestic sex trafficking victims than for internationally trafficked victims. Domestically trafficked victims often already work in the commercial sex industry, where they are approached by traffickers, who invite them to go work for them. Many of them are run-aways, have problems at home, or they suffer from drug addiction. The traffickers lure them in by making them believe they can make more money, and are increasingly protected if they come for work for them (Hodge, DR., 2008). It is the norm that a family member may be the one who sells them, or sets them up with a pimp. A pimp knows exactly what strings to pull, and how to manipulate the victims to lure them in. Oftentimes, the victims fall in love with the perpetrator before they are sold into the commercial sex industry (Fine Collins, 2011).

One prominent case of domestic sex trafficking is the case of billionaire Jeffrey Epstein, who was friends with both a former president and our current one and both distanced themselves from Epstein very quickly after his second arrest in 2019. Epstein ran a sex trafficking ring, and trafficked and molested almost 3 dozen underage girls between the years 1999 and 2006. According to sealed court documents, the former hedge fund manager's associates and employees recruited the girls, and some of the girls were as young as 14 years old. Some of the victims then became recruiters themselves over time. While Epstein was facing charges for the same offenses in 2008, he was able to sign a plea agreement, which kept him out of federal prison. The prosecutors in Palm Beach, including the former secretary of labor Alexander Acosta, who was in 2008 the United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, stated the victims were not credible since they had a history of drug abuse, and decided not to pursue the charges against Jeffrey Epstein. However, eleven years later, it was ruled that the prosecutors in Palm Beach had broken the law by signing the plea deal that kept Epstein out of federal prison (Carlin, 2019). Alexander Acosta, who was later nominated to be President Trump's secretary of labor decided to resign 10 days after Epstein's second arrest on July 6, 2019, amid criticism on how the 2008 case was handled. Epstein was held in federal custody pending hearing, until he committed suicide on August 11, 2019 (Orden, 2019).

In another case of sex trafficking in Chicago, IL, the 38-year old Benjamin Biancofiori faced trial for sex trafficking. The charges brought against him were due to him allegedly running a sex trafficking ring out of his own home in Naperville, IL (Quackenbush, 2018). In February 2018, he was convicted of 14 counts of sex trafficking conspiracy, and one count of obstruction to justice (Meisner, 2018).

International Sex Trafficking

International sex trafficking occurs when a victim is recruited in their home country and trafficked across country borders. For the most part, internationally trafficked victims come from developing and transnational countries, however, human trafficking exists in every country, regardless of socioeconomic status of the victims, and regardless of the history or political structure of a country. Most countries, if a country is not a destination, it is a transit country, or provides a source for human traffickers (Gutierrez Chong & Clark, 2014). Especially international trafficking provides a challenge to law enforcement. To a great number, organized crime groups differ, as they differ in size, leadership, and sophistication. A great deal of corruption is used to the traffickers' advantage, which allows them to traffic victims across international borders. In addition, many other crimes, such as arms smuggling, migrant smuggling, fraud, document forgery, gambling, and drug trafficking may be tied to human trafficking. Further, human trafficking can be hidden behind legal businesses, such as businesses in the tourism industry, airline industry, agriculture, and entertainment industry. Internationally trafficked victims are usually recruited with the promise of a modeling career, a well-paying job abroad, study abroad, or affordable vacation opportunities. However, when the victims arrive in their destination country, their documents are taken from them and they are subject to exploitation by the traffickers (Siskin & Sun Wyler, 2013). In contrast to domestic sex trafficking, international sex-trafficking may also occur after a victim is kidnapped, and transported from one country to another. Generally, kidnapping occurs when a victim does not volunteer to go with the trafficker (Hodge, DR., 2008).

The United States is a popular destination for traffickers. CBS News reported in 2018, that over a dozen individuals were arrested in various cities across the United States for trafficking victims from Thailand into the United States. The victims reported that they entered into a debt contract with the traffickers, in which they had to pay off between \$40,000.00 and \$60,000.00. Oftentimes, breast implant surgery was added to their debt, as it would make them more appealing to the johns. Besides paying off their debt, they were forced to pay rent and living expenses, which made it almost impossible for them to pay off their debt (“Huge International US-Thailand”, 2018).

Recently in the news was the raid of an Asian Day SPA in Jupiter, FL. The massage SPA, that opened in 2012, was known by customers for offering sexual services. Neighbors of the business noticed that the SPA was open at unusual business hours, and people seemed to be living at the business. Additionally, a lot of cars, from pickup trucks to \$90,000 cars used to pull up in front of the business. Many of those who performed sexual services for the exchange of money at the SPA, were held there unable to move freely. The women who worked at the SPA were from China, including one, who was legally present in the United States upon having been granted asylum. She reported she was unable to leave the Day SPA since she was threatened. Arrests at this SPA lead to arrests at another SPA, and an investigation that reaches as far as Orange County, New York, and China (Greenie, 2019).

The Vulnerabilities of Human Trafficking Victims

Human trafficking victims always tend to have vulnerabilities trafficker use to lure them in and exploit them. Although many trafficking victims who are internationally trafficked come from developing countries, there are many victims of human trafficking

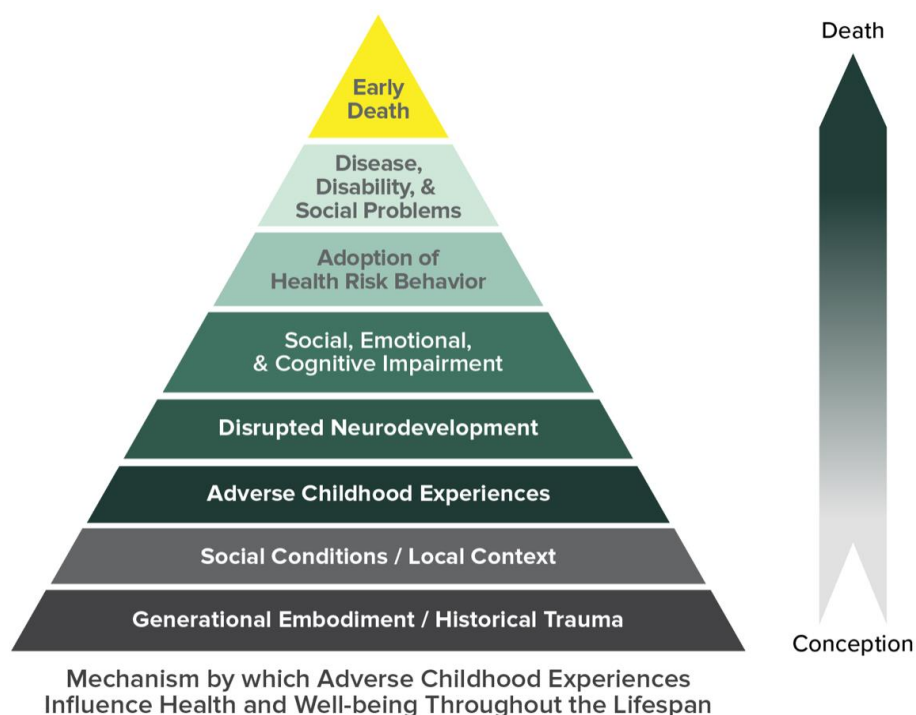
that are domestically trafficked within the United States, and who are American citizens, and American children. Most internationally trafficked victims come from developing countries, in which the need for money and shelter is greater than taking the risk of becoming a victim of human trafficking.

Generally, those who are willing to prostitute themselves are overwhelmingly poor and have an urgent financial need. This is also one of the reasons for human trafficking victims to remain trapped in their trafficking situation (MacKinnon, 2009). For the most part, traffickers who traffic their victims internationally with the destination United States, lure their victims in with the promise of a job and a better life in the United States. They are often family friends, or people within their circle of friends. They may also be female recruiters. Once the victims arrive at their destination, their travel documents are taken from them, and they are told that they have to work off the cost incurred by the traffickers to get them to the United States. This is considered “debt-bondage”. In these cases, the traffickers use the monetary need of a victim, and their hope for a better-quality life in order to gain their trust and consent to travel to their destination country, where they get exploited by the trafficker. Many women who get trafficked from the former Soviet Union respond to ads in which jobs as nannies, waitresses, hostesses, and dancers are advertised. The vulnerabilities of the women who respond to these ads are usually that they try to escape political and social insecurity, or poverty (Hughes, 2001).

Many victims of sex trafficking have also experienced trauma in their childhood. Absent or non-existing parents, sexual abuse as a child, teen pregnancy, and marriages prior to the age of 18 years old all tend to be common denominators of sex trafficking

victims (Boyce et al., 2018). In addition, family dysfunction, homelessness, and just being young also makes someone become more vulnerable to traffickers (Wilson & Butler, 2014). In a study conducted by Cecchet & Thoburn (2014), former victims of human trafficking, in particular victims of domestic sex trafficking were interviewed, and their lives reflected that every participant who took part in the study, was sexually abused as a child, had an absent father, or both. These early childhood experiences of the victims created vulnerabilities that children with normal childhoods do not possess. Children who are sexually abused in their early childhood, who have absent fathers, or both, feel a void for love and acceptance that their counterparts, who lived a happy childhood do not experience (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014). Traffickers target victims who are socially isolated, including victims who are drug addicts, those who experienced violence in the family, school failure, or those with a history of criminal behavior. In addition, victims may include orphans, people with disabilities, or people who are illiterate and innumerate (Deshpande & Nour, 2013).

A study at Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997 examined physical exams combined with surveys with the help of over 17,000 Health Maintenance Organization members from South Carolina, in which the relationship between childhood abuse and household dysfunction and the many of the leading causes of death in adults were examined. As seen in figure 1, data on child abuse, child neglect, household challenges, and other socio-behavioral factors were explored in relation to problems and early death in adults in the original Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

Figure 1*ACE Pyramid*

The ACE pyramid served as the conceptual framework for ACE study, in which child abuse, child neglect, challenges in the household the children grow up, as well as socio economic challenges were examined and how these experiences relate to life and well-being, as well as their death in adulthood. The findings of the ACE study indicated that nearly two-thirds of the participants reported at last one ACE, while one in 5 participants reported 3 or more ACEs. The results of the ACE study reported that there is a direct relationship between a high ACE score and negative health and well-being in adulthood. Figure 2 indicates the relationship between the ACEs and seven negative well-being consequences in adulthood (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

Figure 2*Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts*

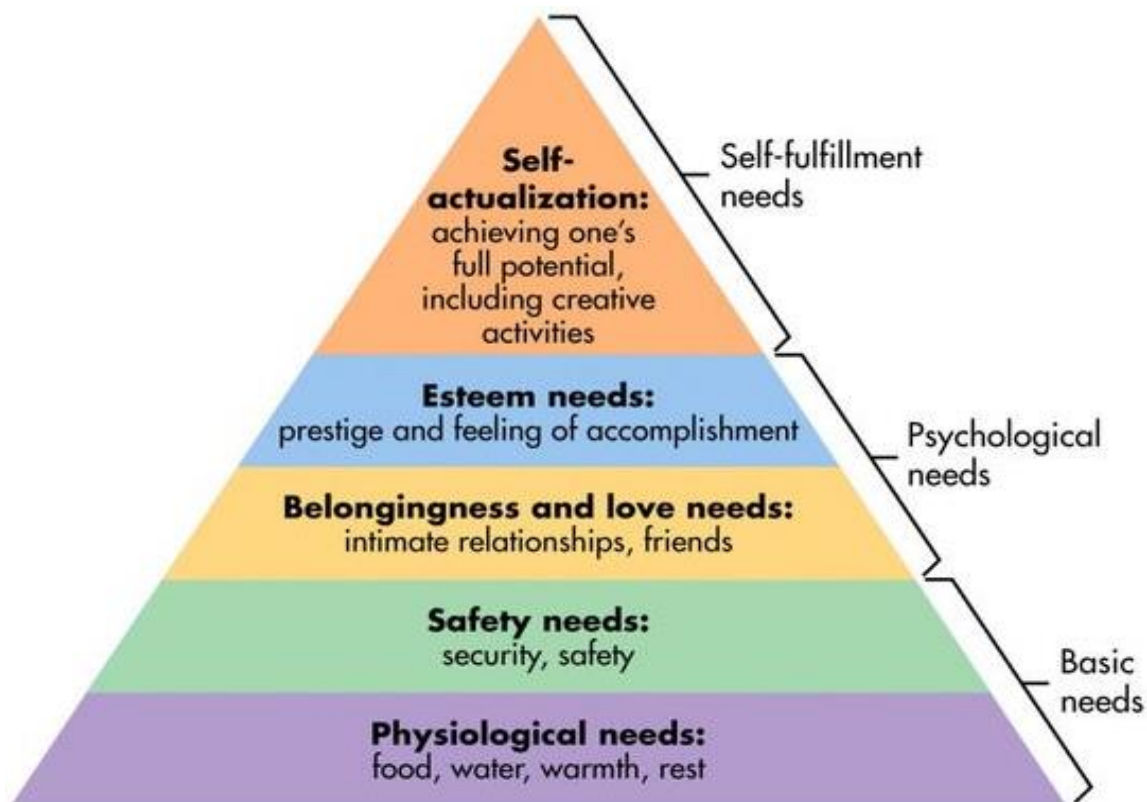
Being aware of the relationship between ACEs and the negative impact of ACEs in adult life, practitioners who work with human trafficking population may provide the victims and survivors they work with an ACE test. An ACE test allows for practitioners to understand the big picture of the victims' lives, including early experiences in their lives, and childhood growing up.

Another way to make sense out of the victims' unfulfilled needs that make them vulnerable to traffickers is by looking at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962), which suggests that there are 5 levels within the pyramid of needs. The needs lower in the hierarchy must be met prior to meeting the ones higher up. The victims' basic needs, which are all the needs on the bottom need to be fulfilled prior to self-actualization on the

top. If the needs on the bottom of the pyramid are not met, then this void makes someone more likely become vulnerable to traffickers who exploit these voids (see figure 3).

Figure 3

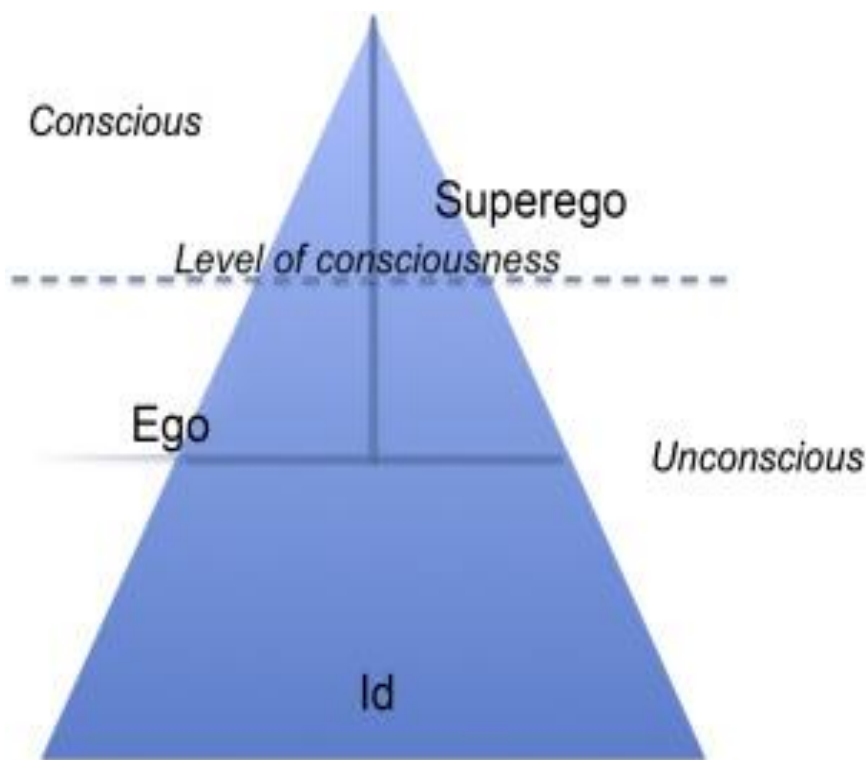
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962)



While Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962) allows us to make sense out of the unmet needs of human trafficking victims, which make them more likely vulnerable to traffickers, Spitzer (1999) established a theory of happiness, which is based on Sigmund Freud's theory of Consciousness (1923) as indicated in figure 4.

Figure 4

Sigmund Freud's Levels of Consciousness (1923)



Freud's theory of the Human Psyche (1923), indicates that there are 3 levels of egos and consciousness, these relate to how a person makes decisions in their life. The ID is the primitive part of the psyche, it includes life and death instincts, biological instincts, and sexual instincts. In this theory, the Id is the unconscious part of the human psyche, therefore, decisions based on the Id are not conscious decisions. The Ego is the part of the Id that has been influenced by the outside world, it is the mediator between the Id, which is rather unrealistic, and the external world. Decisions based on the Ego are oftentimes decisions that satisfy the primitive Id, but may compromise other aspects. However, it does consider societal norms. The Ego operates wanting pleasure and avoiding pain. The Superego on the other hand is based on moral values children learn from their parents in young years. It consists of conscience and ideal self, and the

conscience may punish the ego when behavior that falls short of the ideal self is displayed. It may also reward us when the behavior lives up the ideal self by making us feel proud (Freud, 1923).

Based on Freud's (1923) theory of the Human Psyche, we may want to look at Spitzer's (1999) model of the Four Levels of Happiness. Spitzer (1999) states that there are four levels of happiness, and these four levels appear to be based on to Freud's theory of the Human Psyche (1923). Spitzer's Four Levels of Happiness are the following:

- Laetus – Happiness is an object that can be acquired and happiness depends on whether this object is acquired. This type of happiness is rather short lived, as it only lasts as long as the object it acquired, or enjoyed. It is considered “temporary” and object related.
- Felix – This level of happiness is based on competition with another person. It is based on having more of an object, or winning a comparison game. It is happiness that is unstable, as if the person loses the object or the comparison game, it can lead to a sense of unhappiness and worthlessness.
- Beatitudo – it is the form of happiness that comes from doing good for others, as well as seeing good in others. It is not possible to be in the second stage of happiness, which is being in competition with others, while at the same time being in stage three. However, also stage three is limited as this level of happiness depends on other people, and if these other people are not present any longer, this level of happiness vanishes with them.
- Sublime Beatitudo – this level of happiness occurs when we devote our lives to a higher purpose than ourselves. It is happiness that occurs through a

fulfillment that cannot just come from what we are doing on our own. It is a level of happiness that is difficult to explain, however, it is the ultimate level of happiness that encompasses goodness, beauty, truth, and love.

Victims of human trafficking operate within the first 2 levels of happiness; Laetus and Felix. These types of happiness are temporary, achieved through the lifestyle, the drugs, or the false sense of love that is provided by the traffickers.

Trauma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Stockholm Syndrome

The majority of female sex trafficking victims are already victims of some other abuse prior to becoming victims of sex trafficking. Therefore, these victims are already traumatized prior to becoming victims of sex trafficking. According to Carlson & Dalenberg (2000, p. 4-28), experiencing an extremely negative event, which is uncontrollable and sudden are the 3 elements traumatizing events usually consist of: Feelings of guilt, shame, anger, a sense of betrayal, shock, helplessness, and distrust are frequent among sex trafficking victims, and they can lead to self-medication and even suicide (Bezpalcha, 2003). Most female sex trafficking victims were sexually abused as children, neglected by their parents, in particular by their fathers, or had an absent father (Cecchet & Thoburn 2014). Since they were already victims prior to becoming sex trafficking victims, they were already suffering from trauma for the abuse they endured as children.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is experienced by a majority of all victims of sex trafficking. The symptoms of PTSD consist of intrusion, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, as well as alterations in arousal and reactivity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Feelings of sadness and depression

may be experienced years after the victims left the trafficking situation (Raymond & Hughes, 2001) However, not all victims of sex trafficking experience PTSD equally (Jenkins, 1999).

There is also a psychological condition, called “Stockholm Syndrome”, in which victims fall for their perpetrator. Stockholm Syndrome is named after events that occurred in 1973, in Stockholm, Sweden, and describes the “bond” that frequently develops between hostages and their captors, in which the hostages hold no grudge against their captors. It has been suggested that this bond occurs due to the high stress situation hostages go through when they are captured and being held hostage. Sigmund Freud’s suggests that due to the stress victims are living through, the ego must react in ways to eliminate the captor as a threat, and by taking on the captors’ point of view, this process of elimination can be achieved (Mc Kenzie, 1987).

Besides Stockholm Syndrome, trauma bonding is another psychological factor that needs to be taken into consideration when coming across human trafficking victims. Trauma bonding occurs when victims of human trafficking and the traffickers develop a co-dependent relationship, which takes on the form of a pseudo familiar relationship (Polaris, 2019). Further, it is an emotional dependency in a relationship that is unbalanced to the degree, that victims turn to revalidation from their perpetrators, and go to great extends to please the abuser (Carnes, 1997).

Victims can also become prey to traffickers when hiring a coyote to smuggle them out of the country into another country, or into the United States. By putting their lives into the coyotes’ hands, they take the risk to become targets for traffickers. A popular belief is that by tightening up the borders, and limiting the opportunity to claim

asylum in the United States, human trafficking will decrease. This belief has proven the opposite, as when it becomes harder to claim asylum, mainly women and children tend to turn to coyotes in order to cross the border into the United States illegally, as the need is greater than the risk of getting caught or becoming victims of a crime, or even becoming victims of traffickers. By doing so, they become easy prey for traffickers, especially if they are not accompanied by their husbands or parents (Feingold, 2005).

To be an undocumented migrant in the United States increases the chances for a woman to become a victim of sex trafficking. It is oftentimes the case that young women initially voluntarily participate in crossing the border illegally, and then engage in prostitution. However, the voluntary participation then turns into a forced situation, in which traffickers ensure that the victims are unable to leave when they wish to. The fear of prosecution by law enforcement for crossing the border illegally, and the fear of deportation back to their native countries keep victims trapped in their situation (Tomkinson, 2012). When a female migrant's immigration status is uncertain, and she only has a very limited amount of money and is cut off from her natural support system, she is most vulnerable (Boak et al., 2003).

Other common denominators of human trafficking victims are a young age at the time of entry into the trafficking situation. The majority of sex trafficking victims in the United States were minors at the time of their recruitment into the sex industry. The most vulnerable population is the youth that ran away from home, the ones who were "thrown away" by their parents, and those in the foster care system and the protective service system (Kotrla, 2010). It appears, that trafficking victims always have some sort of vulnerabilities, which the traffickers and pimps use in order to entrap them into their

human trafficking situation. Whether it is an emotional void caused by absent parents, any other form of child abuse, or a need for financial or political security – traffickers tend to find a way to lure their victims in due to vulnerabilities the traffickers use to their advantage.

The Recruitment Strategies

The recruitment strategies of international human trafficking victims and domestically trafficked victims differ. However, in 46% of all human trafficking cases, the victims were already acquainted with their recruiter. Oftentimes, the victims feel they can trust their recruiter, because they use informal networks like family or friends of the victims to gain their trust. Oftentimes, the recruiters are women. Another method for the recruitment of victims are advertisements for work or study abroad, agencies for employment or travel, and some recruiters arrange marriages under false pretenses. Recruiters may also go to public places to recruit victims (Transparency International – The Global Coalition against Corruption, 2011).

The most common recruitment tactics of internationally trafficked victims are to lure the victims in with deceptive strategies, and for the most part friends, family, or acquaintances play a key role in their recruitment. This usually occurs through second wave trafficking, which happens when a woman who was trafficked moves from victim to perpetrator. Once a woman has been trafficked, there are not many escape routes. One way to escape the daily abuse is to return home and recruit other women for the traffickers (Hughes, 2001). About 20% of trafficked women are lured in through advertisements in which low skilled jobs abroad as nannies, waitresses, dancers, or hostesses are advertised. Another form of recruitment is usually done by organized crime

rings, which use mail-order-brides, and international introduction services for recruitment purposes (Hughes, 2001).

The internet is a way for traffickers to recruit victims. In chat rooms and social networking sites, traffickers recruit their victims by promising them a good job, a modeling career, or a better life abroad. However, in some countries, traffickers address poor families, who are desperate for food, and sell their children to traffickers because they have no other way to make money and bring food on the table (Rafferty, 2013).

Many domestic sex trafficking victims however are recruited by pimps, who initially masquerade as boyfriends. These traffickers are able to lure their victims in by taking advantage of the victims' vulnerabilities. Pimps do not target confident women and girls; pimps target women and girls who are missing something in their lives. Since most victims experienced trauma in their childhood, whether it be by sexual abuse or absent parents, the victims usually experience a void for feeling loved and are afraid of getting abandoned. Oftentimes, the victims do not have a roof over their head, or are going through rough times in their lives. By masquerading as boyfriends who treat them exceptionally well at first; by buying them food, providing them with shelter, and by buying them gifts, traffickers are able to lure in the victims because they are able fill the victims' void. Once the victim fell for the trafficker, the trafficker manipulates the victim into working in the sex industry and bring the earnings back to the trafficker, who in return provides the victim with food, shelter, and oftentimes with the feeling of belonging. The victims are not allowed to do anything without asking the trafficker for permission first (Mirfenderski, 2017).

The majority of traffickers and pimps are male, however, there are females who work as traffickers. Female traffickers are usually females who have been trafficked themselves, or who have previously worked in the commercial sex industry, then progressed to becoming independent and run their own business. Most male traffickers enter the business through friends or family, while a small number entered the business by themselves (Zahng, 2011).

There are two commonly known tactics used by traffickers and pimps: Guerilla pimping and Finesse pimping. Guerilla pimping consists of the use of violence in order to recruit and retain the victim. Threats, intimidation, and aggression are used as the methods for recruitment and to keep the victims enslaved. Finesse pimping occurs when traffickers use compassion, kindness, and psychological games to recruit and retain the victims. Traffickers may buy victims gifts, give them money, clothes, shelter, food, or drugs. By doing so the trafficker ensures the victims start to feel obligated and indebted to the trafficker (Deshpande & Nour, 2013).

The Market for Sex Trafficking

Human trafficking is in the top tier of most profitable illicit business on the planet. Consensual labor is not as profitable as non-consensual labor, in which in particular minors are more profitable, as they cannot truly consent. In addition, in comparison to narcotics, or weapons sale, human trafficking is a renewable and limitless profit, in which the trafficker is able to sell the same person over and over and make a profit (Marcus et al., 2016). The market for traffickers is lucrative due to the demand that exists in the commercial sex industry. In the United States, a culture of tolerance exists, in which pimping, stripping, and going to the strip club is a glamorized lifestyle. If there

would not be such a demand, pimps and traffickers would be out of business. This culture of tolerance is promoted in music videos, clothing, video games, songs, and other forms of entertainment. Pimps are admired as rebels and are considered hip and cool. When pimping and prostitution are normalized and even glamorized, the result is that young females are drawn to this glamorized lifestyle, and it is much easier for pimps to recruit the youth into the life of the commercial sex industry. Pimps control markets, such as sex parlors, escort and massage services, conventions, and prostitution at tourist venues (Kotrla, 2010).

Very common markets are big sporting events. Generally, big sporting events are magnets for human trafficking and pimping. Every super bowl draws along traffickers and pimps into the host town. Although there is no proof that there is really an increase in human trafficking around big sporting events, there is definitely an increased the demand for the purchase of sex acts by those who travel into the host towns of large sporting events. During big sporting events, business for strip clubs, escort services, massage parlors and massage services increase. In addition, the majority of visitors who travel into the host towns where big sporting events take place, are men (Finkel & Finkel, 2015).

There is a high demand for the commercial sex industry in tourist destinations, tourist venues, as well as border towns to the United States, such as Tijuana, Mexico, which is a popular weekend get-away destination for spring breakers and sailors in San Diego. Mexico offers young people under 21 alcoholic beverages, and there are many clubs, bars, strip clubs, and restaurants which cater to the U.S. clientele (Zhang, 2011). As long as the demand for sex workers is high, there is always a business opportunity for traffickers and pimps to make a living. According to Swarens (2018), a convicted john

was interviewed, and asked if he cares about the life of the girl he tried to purchase. He responded that he was not interested in knowing “how the sausage was made” (p.1). Buyers of trafficking victims do not seem to see the victims as victims, or as children if they are underage. They only see them as objects (Swarens, 2018).

In order to combat human trafficking effectively, the demand for trafficking victims must be addressed. Without addressing the demand, human trafficking will remain a lucrative business. The demand is addressed differently all over the United States. However, since most of the business takes place in online forums and chat rooms not everyone has access to, law enforcement has to gain access, and prosecute the buyers, as well as free the victims. While the public outcry about the problem mainly focuses on the prosecution of the traffickers, the buying customers are let off the hook too easily. However, with that said, law enforcement does not focus solely on the traffickers. For example, in Seattle, “Operation on Demand” led to the successful prosecution of 110 buyers (Godoy, 2018). All over the United States, and in particular in metropolitan areas that are popular destinations for human traffickers and their victims, the focus on the buying customers of sex trafficking victims would allow the business to become less lucrative, and make it unworthy for traffickers to take the chance of trafficking more victims.

Laws in the United States and Abroad

The United States tends to have a criminal justice-based approach to Human Trafficking, in particular to sex trafficking. Human trafficking and prostitution are mainly considered crime problems. However, in recent years, the public and victim advocate groups have been increasingly concerned with human trafficking and the victims of

human trafficking, and as a result, the criminal justice-based approach has shifted to a more victim-based approach in the battle against human trafficking (Farell & Cronin, 2015). In response to the public's concerns, Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000 (TVPA), in order to increase law enforcement's efforts to effectively combat human trafficking, while taking a more victim-based approach. Not only did the act establish new statutory provisions for charging traffickers, but also established new grant programs for victims, new visa categories for internationally trafficked victims who are not U.S. citizen or lawful permanent residents, and provisions for the monitoring and gathering data on anti-trafficking efforts (Jude & Bursaw, 2018). Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the agency of the Department of Homeland Security, which provides international victims of trafficking with continued presence in the United States. Once continued presence has been granted, victims can apply for T-visas or U-visas with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which is the agency of the Department of Homeland Security, that provides victims of human trafficking with temporary legal immigration status in the United States if they qualify. After four years, victims may apply for permanent resident status (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2010). The TVPA differs between worthy victims and unworthy victims. The unworthy victims are often those who have ended up as trafficking victims because they were undocumented migrants who engaged in sex work voluntarily, then ended up in a trafficking situation. Trafficking victims must be able to convey to law enforcement, Custom Enforcement Agents, and Federal Prosecutors, that they endured "raw physical suffering, did not voluntarily cross the border illegally, and did not engage in sex work by choice". Despite a lot of suffering a

victim might have endured, if the victim is not able to convey to law enforcement, Custom Enforcement Agents, and Federal prosecutors, that they are passive victims, they will be labeled as criminals and subsequently deported (Tompkinson, 2012).

In 2015, The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) was passed by the House and the Senate, and signed into law by President Barack Obama on May 29, 2015. The JVTA ensures increased assistance to the victim populations by providing victims of human trafficking with immediate services once they have been classified as victims of human trafficking. In addition to increased victims' services, the JVTA also ensures an increased federal response to the crime of human trafficking, and it also changes policies regarding the response to domestic sex trafficking of children. Further, the JVTA ensures an increased coordination among law enforcement agencies. From human trafficking prevention to Government Accountability, the JVTA ensures that grant programs are established and the funds are directed appropriately (Congressional Research Service, 2015).

Currently, there are many bills that are proposed in Congress, however, only a very small percentage of those bills proposed will actually make it through the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives and be signed into law. One bill that was introduced was the "Put Trafficking Victims First Act of 2019". This bill passed the U.S. House on February 7, 2019, and will go to the U.S Senate next. There is a chance that it will pass the U.S. Senate. "The Put Trafficking Victims First Act of 2019" tries to shift the criminal justice centered approach when criminally prosecuting the crime of human trafficking, to a more victims centered approach of prosecution, in which the victims are

ensured the appropriate help they need, and in which they have a higher chance of making a recovery (Bass, 2019).

A bill that is currently pending Senate approval, is the “Human Trafficking Accountability Act”, and the “Trafficking Victims Housing Act”, which were introduced together by U.S. Congress woman Joyce Beatty, and U.S. Congress woman Ann Wagner. Both Congress women introduced their bill on January 11, 2019 , which is National Human Trafficking Awareness Day. While both bills were introduced in the House, they still have to be passed by the House, then be introduced in the Senate and successfully pass the Senate for the bill to get signed into law. If successful, the Human Trafficking Accountability Act would require a minimum of one Assistant U.S. attorney in each judicial district to serve as a Human Justice Coordinator, and ensure that there is an increase of human trafficking cases getting prosecuted. The Trafficking Victims Housing Act focuses on increased human trafficking victim services, in particular to ensure housing human trafficking victims who are homeless (“Beatty, Wagner Team up”, 2019). Beatty & Wagner’s “Trafficking Accountability Act” would be beneficial to the prosecution of traffickers, as it would ensure that in every district, one U.S. Attorney is making sure, cases of human trafficking are indeed prosecuted, and not just charged with lesser crimes, as it has been occurring in the majority of human trafficking cases around the United States.

A third bill, that was introduced, but not yet passed is the “Human Trafficking Survivor Tax Relief Act”, introduced by Congressmen Brad Schneider and Kenny Marchant on September 17, 2018. This bill would ensure that civil damages, restitution, and any other money received in aid by human trafficking victims would be tax exempt.

While criminal restitution payments are already tax exempt, other payments would be added to the exemptions (“Schneider , Marchant Introduce Bipartisan”, 2019).

The popularly known Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, mandates, that the U.S. State Department places every country into one of 4 tiers. The tier system is based on the extend of effort’s, in which a countries government combats human trafficking. Tier 1 does not mean that a country does not have a human trafficking problem, but rather that a country’s government makes serious efforts to eliminate the human trafficking problem, and each year, a tier 1 country makes progress in the combating human trafficking. A tier 1 country represents a country that is making constant progress and serious efforts in the fight against human trafficking (U.S. Department of States, 2018).

According to the U.S. Department of State (2018), the United States government demonstrates serious and sustained efforts for the elimination of human trafficking. Not only does the government of the United States demonstrate serious efforts in the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases, but also victims’ services are provided. However, while the United States is in the tier 1 category regarding the combating of human trafficking, victims advocate groups continue to report that not all victim services are provided as they should be, and that the government appears to prioritize investigations and the prosecution of sex trafficking over labor trafficking. In addition, victims get prosecuted frequently for other crimes they committed but which related to their trafficking victimization (p.442).

Since the passage of the TVPA, all 50 states have enacted laws to criminalize and prosecute human trafficking. However, not all laws are equally advantageous in

prosecuting human trafficking, and the effectiveness of the new laws depend on how the designated law enforcement agencies apply them (Farrell et al., 2014). The prosecutor has a significant amount of power that remains unchecked. In the end, the prosecutor is the person who decides who gets charged, what type of charge, and whether a plea bargain is offered, and if, what kind of plea bargain is offered. It is also the prosecutor, who makes a recommendation about the type of sentence an offender shall receive. It is the prosecutor who really has the most power over an offender's life, as it is the prosecutor who has the discretion about whether a case gets prosecuted. It is no different with human trafficking cases. The prosecutors decide whether a human trafficking case gets prosecuted. With that, a prosecutor may look at the probability of an offender's conviction. Prosecutors look at the credibility of the victims, and how victims may look to a jury. Overall, one third of all human trafficking cases do not get prosecuted, and traffickers of the remaining cases do not usually face human trafficking charges, but instead lesser crimes, such as the transport of females for the purposes of prostitution, or compelling prostitution. Most traffickers are also able to take a plea bargain, in which they plead guilty to lesser charges (Spohn, 2014).

To increase the prosecution rates of human trafficking cases, in addition to the TVPA, new laws have been enacted. The Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA), and the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) bills became laws in April 2018 (The White House, 2019). The laws make it easier for states to prosecute traffickers, by making it illegal to knowingly assist, support, or facilitate sex trafficking. Thanks to these laws, in April 2018, the online site "Backpage" was seized by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the

Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division. “Backpage” was known to have a section that allowed for classified ads, which included the advertising of prostitution and sex trafficking of minors by advertising with code words, such as “amber alert” (Savage & Williams, 2018). With the passing of the SESTA and the FOSTA, bills were signed into law, which help combating human trafficking (The White House, 2019). However, the passing of these bills also had critics, who were generally unhappy about these bills getting signed into law. The critics are for the most part those who profited from websites, such as Backpage.com. However, there are critics of SESTA and FOSTA. In particular, FOSTA is criticized for eliminating the possibility for sex workers to advertise online. And not only that, sex workers used to communicate with each other online in forums about johns who would get services, then do not want to pay, or are violent. Without these forms of screening tools, sex workers in the United States are increasingly working in the streets, and potentially see dangerous customers (Jackson & Heineman, 2018).

Two organizations; the Woodhull Freedom Foundation, and the Human Rights Watch, which both promote sexual freedom as a human right, filed a lawsuit against FOSTA, since FOSTA prohibits the facilitation of prostitution online (Gullo & Greene, 2019). FOSTA also limits the free speech to those, who want to fight for the right of sex workers online, as it could land them in jail. The lawsuit argues, that FOSTA limits sex workers, inhibits free speech, and inhibits those who are choosing sex work as their profession, to advertise for their services online. Additionally, the lawsuit argues that workers - regardless of the nature of their work, have rights, and the right of sex workers should be protected equally as the rights of other workers (Wheeler, 2018). However,

Woodhull Freedom Foundation, and Human Rights Watch seem to dismiss the fact that prostitution is illegal across the United States, with few exceptions. Those who do prostitute themselves, take the chance to get arrested and face prostitution charges. These laws have always been in place, and FOSTA just limits the promotion of prostitution online, in addition to prostitution being illegal.

In most European countries, sex trafficking is the most common form of human trafficking. While most countries criminalized the purchase of sex from children, the purchase of sex from adults is not treated differently. In many European countries, prostitution is legal. However, the purchase of sex from people who are forced to sell sex has been criminalized for in most European countries (Kelemen & Johansson, 2013). For example, in Sweden, the purchase of sex has been criminalized. When the act of selling sex is not criminal but instead the purchase of sex is, then the focus shifts onto the consumer. Sweden legalized prostitution, but criminalized the purchase of sex. Also, the Netherlands, Germany, and Australia have legalized prostitution, and contrary to popular beliefs, human trafficking has not increased. On the contrary, these countries have received top marks in human trafficking reports (Feingold, 2005).

A Response to Human Trafficking -Training for First Responders, Nurses, and Social Workers

One of the biggest challenges is to identify human trafficking victims. Many human trafficking victims do not identify with being victims of human trafficking. Human trafficking is a secret activity, in which the victims are usually completely isolated from the public. Due to the severe trauma and abuse victims endure, they are often unable or unwilling to escape the trafficking situation. Second, human trafficking

can be easily misclassified with prostitution, and international human trafficking victims can be misclassified as migrants who illegally entered the United States. As a result, law enforcement may see human trafficking victims as perpetrators rather than victims (Farrell et al., 2010).

As a response to the difficulties in recognizing human trafficking victims, training has been put into place in order for those who may encounter human trafficking victims due to their professions. Law enforcement, first responders, immigration officials, doctors and nurses in hospitals, as well as social workers are among those who benefit from training in how to recognize human trafficking victims, as they are the professionals who are most likely to come into contact with victims of human trafficking. These professionals must be able to recognize the victims in order to treat them accordingly. It is only possible to successfully prosecute traffickers and pimps when victims come forward. It is much more likely for human trafficking victims to come forward, once they are recognized as victims, and freed from their trafficking situation. Frequently, victims come from a history of abuse, therefore do not see themselves as victims (Parsons et al., 2014).

In particular, nurses are in a unique position to help victims of sex trafficking. Sex trafficking victims typically only present for medical help when their condition prevents them from making monetary gains. In other words, a trafficker will only allow a victim to get medical help when the medical condition is so severe, that it intervenes with the trafficker's monetary gain. At this point, the victims may present genital trauma, broken bones, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, a history of unsafe abortions, chronic pain, malnutrition, sleep deprivation, substance abuse issues, post-traumatic

stress syndrome, anxiety, and depression. In hospitals around the United States, nurses have received the training necessary to recognize victims of trafficking, and to act appropriately and separate the victims from their traffickers, and get them in touch with social workers (Chesnay, 2013).

Additionally, social workers around the United States have received training to recognize and screen for victims of sex trafficking. A history of solicitation charges, a history of drug charges, having an older controlling boyfriend or girlfriend, signs of bruising, depression, working long hours, anxiety, fear, coached or rehearsed responses, inappropriate dressing, are all signs of trafficking victimization. Additionally, victims may respond to questions about time, place, and persons incorrectly as they are unable to recall due to a combination of exhaustion, frequent transportation from one location to another, and long working hours (Chesnay, 2013).

However, a counselor's role may differ depending on whether a victim is currently trafficked or was a trafficking victim in the past. Rarely does it occur that a trafficking victim seeks mental health services independently while they are being trafficked. Victims usually fear that if they would reveal their situation, there would be consequences, such as physical violence on behalf of the trafficker. For the most part, victims seek mental health services due to court mandates for drug charges. Pretrial intervention programs often require the attendance of educational classes and mental health services. An additional challenge for mental health counselors is the common mistrust among human trafficking victims. It is essential for counselors to build trust with human trafficking victims, use unconditional positive regard, empathy, and authenticity.

Once trust is gained, counselors may develop safety plans for a victim and share resources, such as the national Human Trafficking Hotline (Litam, 2017).

The National Human Trafficking Hotline

Another response that was established the by U.S. government was by funding the Polaris Project, which is a governmental non-profit organization that established and operates the national human trafficking hotline. This hotline was established in 2007, and is available to assist victims through calls, online chat, or text messages 24/7, 365 days a year. This hotline allows victims or anyone who believes that they observed or suspect human trafficking to call into the hotline. The hotline connects victims with resources. Also practitioners are connected with resources for the victims, citizens who call in because they suspect or have witnessed human trafficking are able to leave a tip.

The 2019 data from the Polaris Project (2020), reported that between December 20087, and December 2019, 63,380 human trafficking situations were identified through the national human trafficking hotline. In 2019 alone, 11,500 trafficking situations were identified as well as 4384 traffickers. In 2019, 4312 victims and survivors personally contacted the National Trafficking Hotline, which is an increase of 19% from the prior year, which indicates that the more resources are available for victims to access, such as posters or informative flyers about the National Trafficking Hotline, the more likely they will be able to reach out when provided with the opportunity to reach out in order to exit that life (Polaris Project, 2020).

The public is also encouraged to contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline when they come across suspected human trafficking activity. While these tips from the public are very helpful for law enforcement, unfortunately in the recent months, due to

baseless conspiracy theories making the rounds among social media outlets and the U.S. population, a movement named “Qanon” is responsible for unnecessary calls backing up the National Human Trafficking Hotline. “Qanon” urges that actors in Hollywood, as well as high ranking politicians, and the online retailer “Wayfair” are involved in a complex scheme involving the trafficking of children. The National Human Trafficking Hotline has since been overwhelmed with callers, making it more difficult for real victims of human trafficking to get through and get connected with the resources they so desperately need. While those reports made by individuals of the “Qanon” movement probably have their heart in the right place and are concerned about human trafficking, none of their reports to the National Human Trafficking Hotline had real-life connections with human trafficking victims or observed actual human trafficking activity (Polaris Project, 2020).

Treatment for Human Trafficking Victims

While there is psychotherapy, counseling, as well as fellowship opportunities, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, or human trafficking support groups that victims may want to join, the role of spirituality in the recovery models for human trafficking victims has been explored by Nguyen et al. (2014). Nguyen et al. use Herman’s model of trauma recovery (1992), which suggests that there are three levels of recovery after trauma: Establishing safety and security, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection (2002). Nguyen et al. (2014) suggest that by implementing spirituality into Herman’s recovery model, it complements the victim’s recovery and healing process, as spirituality is considered a search for meaning and connection. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun (1999), finding meaning in trauma involves seeing the meaning in what occurred and the

ability to maintain a meaningful view of life regardless of the event that occurred (p. 455 - 471). By being able to do so, Vis and Boynton (2008), are able to create a different narrative of the traumatic event; a narrative that allows them to grow emotionally rather than the inability to move beyond loss and hopelessness (p. 74). This new narrative they are creating about the traumatic event they experienced allows them to make sense out of the event and provides insight into how they are able to use the newly acquired insight into how they shape their future (Basset, 2006).

Theoretical Analysis: Liberal Feminism

Feminist theories try to understand and explain women's subordination within the system (Tickner & Sjoberg, 2016). Most traffickers and pimps are men, only a few are women, and these are for the most part women who were trafficked themselves at some point in their lives, and managed to move up in the hierarchy of a trafficking ring. However, the men who work as traffickers and pimps do not respect women; if they would respect women then they would not work in this profession. Liberal feminism focuses on the subordination of women in global politics. Additionally, Liberal Feminists question what a world with more females in power positions would look like (Tickner & Sjoberg, 2016). According to Caprioli and Boyer (2001), international crises decrease when gender equality increases (p.1). Women tend to solve conflicts more peacefully than men, and they tend to be more diplomatic, while men are more inclined to use violence to solve conflicts, and are generally more aggressive than women. Further, women are less competitive than men are, which results in less power struggles. Men also engage in more power struggles for personal gain than women do (Caprioli & Boyer, 2001).

Sex trafficking victims generally have no choice. Gender equality also does not exist in every country, and not in developing countries. In those countries where poverty is common and families struggle to get food on the table, it is not uncommon for parents to sell their children to trafficker out of desperation for money. At times, the promise of a better life for their children also plays a factor.

In some countries, traditionally, parents arrange the marriage for their daughters. The groom, his family, or both are usually the ones who chose the bride, and by getting the bride's father's permission her faith is decided without her having a voice. Often, the amount of money and gifts a family receives plays a major role in the process. While for Western countries these traditions are completely unimaginable, it is normal in other countries, and the women who end up in these marriages can either get lucky and live a good life, or they live a life full of abuse. This tradition itself shows how little say females have in some countries.

The same occurs in the commercial sex industry. The "johns", or paying customers of the commercial sex industry are mostly known to be men. It is rather unusual for women to frequent brothels, massage parlors, or use the services of escorts. However, when it comes to sex with children, not all the johns are pedophiles, who premeditate having sex with children. A great number of johns are opportunists, who take advantage of the situation and availability that presents itself to them. They simply do not turn the opportunity to have sex with a child away when it presents itself to them (Swarens, 2018).

Suppression is always a tactic used by traffickers and pimps, and even by the consumers. Not obeying, wanting to leave, or denying a customer's request always has

consequences in the form of punishment that may include near death. The two business models that traffickers and pimps use are control with violence, and control with drugs. Both business models suppress the victims (Fine Collins, 2011). All areas of the victim's life are suppressed and the victims – who are for the most part females, have no say or control about their own lives anymore. They start to depend on the traffickers for drugs or because they believe that without the traffickers they do not stand a chance in life. Their self-esteem has become so low that they started believing they need the trafficker, have nowhere else to go, or they depend on the trafficker for providing them with a lifestyle or drugs they feel they need (Fine Collins, 2011).

Internationally trafficked victims are unable to leave the trafficking situation because their travel documents are taken from them once they arrive at their destination. In addition, they are usually not in legal immigration status and fear getting deported. In addition, the traffickers threaten them with violence should they run away, and often use violence against their families back in their home countries (“Huge International US-Thailand”, 2018). If women in Developing world countries had more choices, they would not be sold by their families. They would be able to stand up to their own families, who sell them to the traffickers. Liberal Feminism suggests that by removing obstacles that previously denied women access to equal rights and opportunities as men, equality can be achieved (Tickner & Sjoberg, 2016). Additionally, traffickers are for usually men; the commercial sex industry is largely run by men, and the johns are usually men. On the other hand, the victims are for the most part women and children. If more women would be in charge of the commercial sex industry, then they would most likely not allow women and children who are victims of traffickers to work in their establishments.

Instead, the women in charge would probably work with women who entered into the commercial sex industry by free will, and who are able to leave the industry when they feel like leaving. As a result, traffickers would not be able to earn money trafficking and exploiting victims, since there would be no pace for the victims to work. At the same time the incentive for traffickers to engage in trafficking would be taken away from them.

However, Liberal Feminist theory also has drawbacks, and the main drawback is that this theory does not consider the females who work as recruiters in the human trafficking business or hold leadership positions. While most female traffickers have been victims themselves who were able to work themselves up into their positions, some works as traffickers because their families groomed them into their family businesses. Liberal Feminist Theory does not consider female traffickers and their leading roles in both; the commercial sex industry, and sex trafficking. Those females who work in the business are just as unempathetic towards their victims as their male counterparts. Data that was collected from 155 countries showed that 30% of the data identified the gender of the traffickers, and out of those 30%, the majority of the traffickers were women. In some countries, the majority of women get trafficked by other women (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2018). Liberal Feminist Theory does not consider females traffickers.

Gaps in Existing Research

After conducting research on human trafficking, it has become evident that the existing literature about the topic goes back to the early 2000s. However, it appears that while human trafficking has been a problem for many decades, human trafficking has become a more commonly known problem in the last decade, as most of the literature

about the topic this researcher encountered was written fairly recently. While many researchers focused on the reasons why victims of traffickers become victims, they also focused on the methods traffickers use to lure in their victims, the enabling circumstances that make it possible for traffickers to traffic their victims, the laws that were put in place to combat trafficking, as well as the training for those that have access to trafficking victims. Only 2 researchers conducted research on the resilience of human trafficking victims. Cecchet & Thoburn (2014), conducted research about the catalyst events that made victims of sex trafficking leave the commercial sex industry. For the most part, pregnancy and the wish for their children to live and be able to grow up in a healthy environment were named as the catalyst events of the 6 women sex trafficking victims who were interviewed for their research study. These 6 women had left the commercial sex industry and reported on the events that led up to their exiting of the trafficking situation. In their study, Cecchet & Thoburn (2014), reported the experiences of the women participants, and how their resilience to survive the sex industry were due to catalyst events. They also reported abuse in their childhood and absent fathers. However, since only 6 participants were representing the women survivors of sex trafficking, therefore, this researcher determined that more research about the resilience in sex trafficking victims needs to be conducted. Contributing factors that lead victims to make the decision of exiting the commercial sex industry still needed to be further explored. Also, Rothman et al. (2017), mention in their research study, the contributing factors that build resilience among sex trafficking victims must be explored, and that there is a lack of research in this area. According to Rothman et al. (2017), successful prevention strategies can only be developed once the factors contributing to resilience and survival

among human trafficking victims are explored. At the same time, Rothman et al. (2017), try to raise awareness about the existing gap in research. In order to properly develop prevention strategies, as well as rehabilitation programs, research about these contributing factors needs to be conducted, which allow for victims of human trafficking to recover and survive the type of abuse they endured. At the same time, society should be aware which factors make a difference in a young women's lives, and which factors prevent girls and young women. from becoming a victims of human trafficking (p. 1046).

In contrast, Zimmerman and Pacock (2013) argue, there is an existing gap in literature about mental health in human trafficking victims. Most victims suffer from anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression. However, being held captured by a trafficker can take on similar forms as torture (p. 266-267). Interestingly enough, the links that determine the level of post-traumatic stress and health consequences in torture victims has been found to be the degree of control a perpetrator has over a victim, and the degree of predictability (Basoglou and Mineka (1992). Additionally, research in trauma survivors has proven that many of the survivors blame themselves to a great extend for their misfortunate situation, and for "being so stupid, or naïve" to end up in these situations. Overall, a victims-based approach is recommended, in which the victims mental health is cared for early on in order to rehabilitate victims appropriately (Zimmerman & Pacock, 2013).

Another area that presents research problems and challenges in the research of human trafficking, are the areas of confusion about human trafficking. The nature of human trafficking, the magnitude of human trafficking, and the best means for the eradication of human trafficking are areas that present challenges for those, who conduct

research in human trafficking. Additionally, the relationship between human trafficking and legalized adult prostitution and sex trafficking has not been fully researched. The estimated size of the problem versus the actual number of victims who identified with being victims of human traffickers does not match up, and there is a significant gap in the estimated magnitude of the problem, and the actual number of victims. Sex trafficking within the broad spectrum of legal prostitution must be further explored and researched in order to gain a better picture about how the two relate to each other (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2013).

Additionally, it appears that there are research gaps when it comes to migrant women falling prey to traffickers. It is more likely for a migrant woman to fall prey to traffickers than for the rest of the population. These women are especially vulnerable, since they are in the migration process. Gaps in policies and laws should be researched that allow these migrant women to fall through the gaps in legislation. Only by defining the gaps that allow migrant women to fall through these gaps, steps should be taken in order to change and improve the legislation (Bethlehem & Gordon, 2015). There is also a fine line between migrants that have become trafficking victims after they entered the United States, and those who have been trafficked into the United States. Only those, who were threatened and coerced by traffickers on their journey into the United States are identified as human trafficking victims. On the other hand, those who volunteered to be smuggled over the border into the United States illegally, then became trafficking victims once they arrived in the United States, are not able to identify as human trafficking victims (Tripp & McMahon, 2015).

Another research gap seems to exist within the correlation of organized crime, and human trafficking. There seems to be a correlation, and it is well known from previous research that organized crime groups are involved in human trafficking, however, the degree of involvement is not entirely clear, as there seems to be a gap in research that needs to be explored further (Tripp & McMahon, 2015).

There is also a research gap about how efficient the two legislations SESTA and FOSTA are since they were signed into law on April 11, 2018 by President Donald Trump (United States Congress, 2019). No research about the efficiency of the new laws appears to have been done by the time of the completion of this research study. SESTA and FOSTA are both meant to close the loophole that provided a safety net to those providers, who used to allow people being sold for sex on their websites. The new laws enhance the Communications Decency Act of 1996, with one section of the law in particular holding those accountable, who allow sex being sold on their websites. The new laws focus on holding the owners of the websites on which sex is promoted accountable for the content of their websites, while those who post on them are not the target of the new laws (Rhodes, Pizzi, & Robinson, 2018). With the new laws SESTA and FOSTA having been put in place, it created a research gap about how much the new laws affected the successful prosecution of traffickers since they were enacted. Also, research should be conducted about whether human trafficking in the United States decreased since the SESTA and FOSTA have been signed into law, or whether the problem still persists, and traffickers simply found other niches to advertise for the services they force their victims to provide. Both research gaps should be addressed in future research about human trafficking. However, recommendations for future research

are made in chapter 5, while chapter 3 explains the research methodology of the study, as well as limitations and validity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, the qualitative approach to research will be discussed, as well as the steps taken in phenomenological research. Phenomenology as a research methodology tries to understand and explain the lived experiences of individuals. Initially, phenomenology was a chosen methodology for those who tried to understand their own lived experience (Smith et al., 2009). By obtaining detailed descriptions of the lived experiences of individuals, the experience and meaning of the experience for the individuals can be understood. The meaning-making and the actual experience are the focal points to researchers who use phenomenology as a research methodology (Munhall, 2012). Researchers collect data from individuals who experienced a phenomenon and develop a description of how they experienced that particular phenomenon, as well as of the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Interpretative phenomenological analysis focuses on the significance of the experience lived (Cooper, 2014).

The objective for this dissertation was to explore and define the resilience among female sex trafficking victims through the lens of subject matter experts, who work with female sex trafficking victims. The data was collected from practitioners who work with female sex trafficking victims, which makes phenomenology an appropriate methodology for exploring the resilience among sex trafficking victims through the shared lived experience from the practitioners (Cooper & Rice, 2014). The common themes found among the collective experience of the practitioners who work with female sex trafficking victims may serve other practitioners who work with sex trafficking victims in the future, and may contribute to putting an emphasis to implementing the findings of this study into their treatment approach, which is meant to promote resilience among the

victims while assisting them in their journey from victimhood to survivors of sex trafficking.

Role of the Researcher

Interviewing is referred to as a “craft” that requires practice (Brinkmann & Kalve, 2015). This researcher has been interviewing the public on a daily basis since June 2016, when she started to work as a background investigator for the Office of Personnel Management, and currently, she is working as an Immigration Services Officer for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which is a component of the Department of Homeland Security. Some of the researcher’s job duties consist of conducting complex in-person interviews, in which applicants are at time in distress due to their situation or their experiences they have lived through. Distressing experiences could be experiences they had when they entered the United States, or they may have become victims of domestic abuse and are applying through the Violence Against Women’s Act (VAWA). Some of the applicants she encountered since working for the Department of Homeland Security may have been victims of crimes or human trafficking and were able to receive a “U” or “T” visa to remain in the United States. This researcher would have encountered them after they received a “U” or “T” visa, in their process of obtaining U.S. lawful permanent resident status or U.S. citizenship. The researcher has access to every individual’s immigration history and data as per her need to know to successfully get the job done. Therefore, the interviewer is skilled to show the necessary empathy when dealing with certain populations, and skilled to make the subject matter experts comfortable conveying the information provided to her will be used in the appropriate way. In order to rule out biases the interviewer possibly has due to the nature of her

profession, bracketing was performed before conducting the interviews. Bracketing in the form of reflexive journaling was also performed prior to analyzing the data collected (Ahern, 1999). Additionally, this researcher does not consider herself religious, yet she had to maintain an open mind and perform bracketing prior to conducting the interviews, as spirituality and religion were subjects that were touched onto during the interviews, as well as during the data analysis part.

Phenomenological Research Methodology

This study employs phenomenological research strategies, as stated by Moustakas (1994), in which critical observation is used to try to understand life experiences of female sex trafficking victims, in particular the factors that influence resiliency among the victims and survivors. The term phenomenology arose in the 18th century, by Franz Hegel (1807), in his work “The Phenomenology of Spirit”. Years later, Franz Brentano (1887), used the term “descriptive psychology or descriptive phenomenology”, which later inspired his student Edmund Husserl’s (1912) development of phenomenology. Intentionality lays at the core principle of classifying ever conscious act with an object (Moran, 2000).

Phenomenology implies that all perceptions have a meaning, and it refers to all internal experiences being the conscious experience of something an individual lives (Moustakas, 1994). For the purpose of this study, the conscious experience is the experiences female sex trafficking victims lived through and shared with the practitioners who helped them in their recovery process. The meaning of the experience is the purpose of phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

There are 3 different approaches to phenomenology: Transcendental phenomenology, existential phenomenology, and interpretative phenomenological analysis. Transcendental phenomenology focuses on the perception, knowledge, and meaning of a lived experience. Additionally, emphasis on textual and structural also account for factors, which may be underlying factors, but which account for what is experienced (Cooper, 2014). The research findings of a transcendental study should be able to answer research questions regarding the nature of the experience, and why the experience of the phenomenon turned out to be what it was (Moustakas, 1994).

Existential phenomenology focuses on the daily existence, and experiences in everyday life. Existential phenomenology also draws heavily on hermeneutics by using the hermeneutic cycle at the analysis stage (Cooper, 2014). In the research process, there are 4 stages, in which in the final stage the researcher may share the findings of his or her study with the participants, as a means of strengthening the validity of their study (Pollio et al., 1997).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a third way of conducting phenomenological research. Interpretative phenomenological analysis has its root in psychology. IPA focuses on experiences and their meanings. Additionally, the type of experiences IPA focuses on are events, which are perceived as having a major influence in someone's life. IPA has an increased focus on an individual's experience rather than focus on collective experience, and the meaning and influence of this experience to a group of people who experienced the same phenomenon (Cooper, 2014).

For this study, the transcendental phenomenological approach to research was selected, as it appeared to be the best fit for the phenomenon for the phenomenon that is

studied. This study tries to research the experiences of human trafficking victims, and in particular, it explores the resilience in female sex trafficking victims. Working with victims of sex trafficking is a collective experience, which all participants have lived through. This shared experience is explored through the lens of the practitioners for the purpose of this study.

Participant Selection

When conducting a phenomenological research study, the sample size should consist of at least 7 participants, and up to 15 as it is suggested by Creswell (2013). In fact, 3 participants are the minimum for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013). Data collection was conducted among those practitioners, who help victims of sex trafficking recover from their experience. However, the main focus of this study are the factors that determine a successful exit from that life and transition into a new life. The data collection focuses on the lived experiences of those practitioners, who worked with female sex trafficking victims and are familiar with their lives and experiences. The subject matter experts who participated in this study were asked about the experiences of victims they worked with or are currently working with. These victims may be from different walks of life, different backgrounds, and they may be trafficked domestically or internationally. They may be U.S. citizens, or immigrant victims of sex trafficking. The victims they work with may be of any age, although this study did not focus on the trafficking of children, but on the trafficking of women and young girls. The experiences the subject matter experts had with the victims may refer to victims who were underage at the time the trafficking began.

Participants were recruited via email, and the snowball effect lead to most of the recruitment, therefore the subject matter experts were selected randomly (Van Manen, 2014). However, all subject matter experts had to have a minimum of one year of experience working with female sex trafficking victims, and they could have not been victims of sex trafficking or human trafficking themselves at any point in their lives. In addition, all participants had to be familiar enough with the lives of female sex trafficking victims to the extend to be able to answer the interview questions. Several interested participants were unable to participate, because while they did work with victims of human trafficking, due to their daily tasks in their jobs, they were not familiar enough with their lives in order to answer the questions the researcher had prepared for the semi-standardized interview. In order to determine whether a participant was qualified to participate in the study, the researcher asked the interested participant about his or her work experience with female victims of sex trafficking, and about his or her familiarity with the victims' lives. The indicator about whether a participant was knowledgeable enough about the victims' lives was whether the participant was aware of the details that surrounded the victim's recruitment into trafficking, and in particular the details surrounding their ability to break free from the trafficking situation. In order to convey these details about the victims' lives to the researcher, the participants had to be aware of the emotions the victims lived through during their whole journey from their time of recruitment into trafficking, to the time they left the trafficking situation and started the recovery process. Additionally, the participants had to be aware of how the survivors felt about their trafficking experience and their lives in totality after they had turned their lives around. From there, the researcher was able to determine whether a participant

could participate in the study. The goal was to recruit as many participants as needed until the data was saturated and no new information was revealed during the interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The gender of the subject matter experts was not a criteria, but all subject matter experts had to be over 21 years old. All subject matter experts were asked to read the information about the study that was provided to them in order to gain basic knowledge about the study. After they signed the consent form, they were informed that they would be allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, the researcher explained that the participants confidentiality is protected as stated on the consent form, and that they must not reveal any sensitive information, or any information that would allow for the victims to be identified. The consent form also explained that the participation in this study poses a minimal risk to the participants, and encourage the participants to ask any questions they may have prior to her signing the consent form and conducting the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After interviewing 9 subject matter experts, the point of data saturation was reached. (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The researcher determined that data saturation was reached because she started to code the data after conducting the first 7 interviews, which was the minimum number of participants the researcher had intended to interview. The researcher then conducted an additional 2 interviews, one with a participant who explicitly works with the female juvenile sex trafficking population and another who has worked all across the board with the female sex trafficking population. Despite that the populations all 9 practitioners work with differ, the same patterns emerged in regard to their resilience and ability to bounce back from the trafficking experience. As stated in Guest et al. (2006), “there is not one-size-fits all method for recognizing when data saturation occurs, some general principle and

concepts apply, such as no emergence of new data, no new themes, no new codes, and an ability to replicate the study.” Therefore, and since no new themes, and codes emerged from the data analysis, the researcher concluded that she has reached the point of data saturation.

To thank the participants for their time and willingness to participate in the study, after the interviews were completed, a Target gift card in the amount of \$25 was mailed to them, or to a non-profit organization of their choice. Additionally, once the study is completed, the participants will be provided with a copy of the research study, which allows them to distribute the study to anyone they work with.

Research Questions

The following research questions arose due to the gaps in existing research:

- What are the factors that keep victims of human traffickers in their trafficking situation before they break free from their trafficker?
- What are the factors that enable victims of sex trafficking to break free from the trafficking situation?
- What were the perceptions of participants regarding the decision of sex trafficking victims to break away from the trafficker? If so, of what nature?
- What are the factors that contribute to female sex trafficking survivor’s healing from the experience of getting trafficked?

Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

For this transcendental phenomenological study, semi-structured interviews took place with practitioners who work with female sex trafficking victims as a way to obtain the data that answers the research questions. All participants must have experienced the

phenomenon studied (Van Manen, 2014). For the purpose of this study, all participants experienced working with female sex trafficking victims who were exploited in the commercial sex industry, and these victims must have met the criteria of being human trafficking victims as defined by the TVPA. All participants had to be very familiar with the lives of the victims they work with and several referrals of interested participants were turned down by the researcher, as these practitioners were not familiar enough with the details about the victims' lives due to the nature of their profession.

Within qualitative research there are 3 types of interviews; The structured interview, the semi-structured interview, and the non-structured interview. The difference between the three types of interviews are that during a structured interview, the interviewer is not allowed to ask follow-up questions. However, during a semi-structured interview, the interviewer is able to ask some follow up questions, while during a non-structured interview, the interviewer is able to ask as many questions as she likes, since there is no set interview structure to follow. A structured interview would limit the researcher to the questions that were prepared for the interview (Berg, 2007). Therefore, for the purpose of this research study, the semi-structured interview approach appeared to be the most appropriate type of interview, providing this researcher with the ability to ask all participants the same questions, then ask a limited amount of follow up questions which clarified any information collected, and narrow down the information as much as possible.

The semi-structured interviews took place via phone with only one participant who requested for the interview to be conducted via FaceTime. The researcher had prepared the research questions, and a limited amount of follow up questions were asked

which developed throughout the course of the interviews. Participants 1, 2, and 3 were contacted at a later point after completion of their initial interviews to answer several follow up questions that arose due to the responses provided by participants 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. The researcher contacted participant 1, 2, and 3 in order to get clarification from the first 3 participants since she had not questioned participant 1, 2, and 3 in depth about several topics that arose throughout the interviews conducted with the other participants. The data was transcribed at the same time the interviews took place, and reflective journaling was used as a method to compliment the data collection, and record the researcher's assumptions, expectations, as well as biases about the data collection (Morrow & Smith, 2000). The researcher was also able to jot down potential themes that emerged throughout the data collection process.

The interview questions were created to answer the research questions of this study, and were designed to describe a collective experience rather than confirm a hypothesis. Therefore, the researcher ensured to stay away from "why" questions, as in phenomenological research, the interview questions must be open-ended, and the participants must be able to freely tell their experience. Leading questions, and "why" questions can potentially lead the interview into a more hypothetical discussion, and shift away from describing an experience (Pollio et al., 1997).

Accordingly, the researcher developed the following interview questions for the participants attempting to answer the research questions:

- Please tell me how many years have you worked with this population, which roles, and what is your educational background:

- How old are the majority of sex trafficking victims you are working with or have worked with in the past?
- How old were they when they were recruited to work in the commercial sex industry?
- Would you say drug addiction is a factor in their situation?
- Where were they approached while they worked in the commercial sex industry or were they recruited into working in the commercial sex industry?
- How did deception play into the recruitment? Were the victims lured into working into the commercial sex industry, or were they aware of the type of work they were expected to perform?
- If they were underage at the time they were recruited, do you know if the recruiter aware of their age at the time he/she recruited them?
- How long did they work in the commercial sex industry?
- Did some of the victims you work(ed) with ever recruit anyone else into the life of working in the commercial sex industry and into being trafficked for sexual exploitation?
- What places where they working at while they were working in the commercial sex industry?
- What type of sexual services did they perform?
- How many customers did they serve on average on a regular day?
- How long did it take most of the victims to leave that life on average?
- Around what age are most of the victims you work(ed) with when they left the commercial sex industry?

- Was there a particular reason why the victims you work(ed) with left the commercial sex industry or was it by chance because of third party intervention?
- Do you know if they ever thought about leaving the commercial sex industry prior to actually leaving that life?
- How long do you believe the sex trafficking survivors you work(ed) with think about leaving that life prior to acting and physically leaving?
- Are you aware of any particular experiences or reasons, like for example any catalyst experiences victims had prior to deciding that it was time to leave?
- Are you aware of any contributing factors that helped these victims leave the commercial sex industry and trafficking situation?
- Are you aware of any outside influence or factors that helped any of the victims you work(ed) with escape their trafficking situations?
- Do you know if any of the victims you work(ed) with are tempted to go back into that life, or do you believe that the majority of victims you worked with are moved on once they escaped and will not look back?
- Are you aware of any outside factors the victims you work(ed) with wished they had in their lives at the time they were trafficked because it would have likely helped them get help and leave that life sooner?
- Are you aware of any outside help, factors, or support that provided the victims you work(ed) with, with the necessary strength or the ability to cope with the experience of being trafficked and exploited in the commercial sex industry?

- What is the most challenging aspect you find in helping this vulnerable population recover from their experience?
- Is there anything in particular that you as a practitioner would like to share for this study or would like people who read this study to know?
- Do you think that if a victim had an inner guidance like spirituality or something they would have not ended up becoming victims?

Additionally, as recommended by Moustakas (1994), the participants were asked all of some of the following follow up questions:

- Have you ever come across internationally trafficked victims and survivors? If so, do you find that their vulnerabilities are different from domestically trafficked females?
- If you came across internationally trafficked victims & survivors - do you find they are generally trapped in their situation as long as domestically trafficked females or do you find they are able to get out sooner?
- How do you believe did experiencing sex trafficking affect the victims you work(ed) with in the long run?
- What changes do you associate in females who have been sex trafficking victims?
- What feelings do you know of were generated with this experience?
- Anything that would contribute to their resilience?
- Have you shared all that you find is significant in reference to the experiences of the female sex trafficking victims you work(ed) with" (p.116).

At the time the subject matter experts received the recruitment email, information about the study, and the consent form, they were instructed to sign the consent form and email it back. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the lockdown that took place when the researcher started the data collection, some participants did not have access to a printer at their homes, therefore, they chose to have the researcher print and mail the consent form to them, and they returned the consent form via postal mail. Once the participants signed the consent form, she asked the participants to provide her with potential time slots they were available for interviews and allowed them to choose their preferred method for the interviews to take place. The researcher offered the subject matter experts to choose between phone interviews, FaceTime, or Skype. Only one subject matter expert chose the interview to be conducted via FaceTime, the remaining 8 participants requested the interviews to be conducted via phone. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher informed the subject matter experts to not reveal any information that is confidential, or reveal information that pertains to any ongoing criminal investigations, in which the victims they work(ed) with serve as witnesses. None of the information they provided to the researcher shall allow the identification of the victims which was also highlighted on the consent form (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the researcher did not use the names of the subject matter experts when transcribing the interviews, but instead assigned them with numbers in the order the interviews were conducted to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

After conducting 9 interviews, the data was saturated, and no new perspectives were introduced on the phenomenon. The data was transcribed on the researcher's computer at the same time the interviews took place. The researcher saved the data files

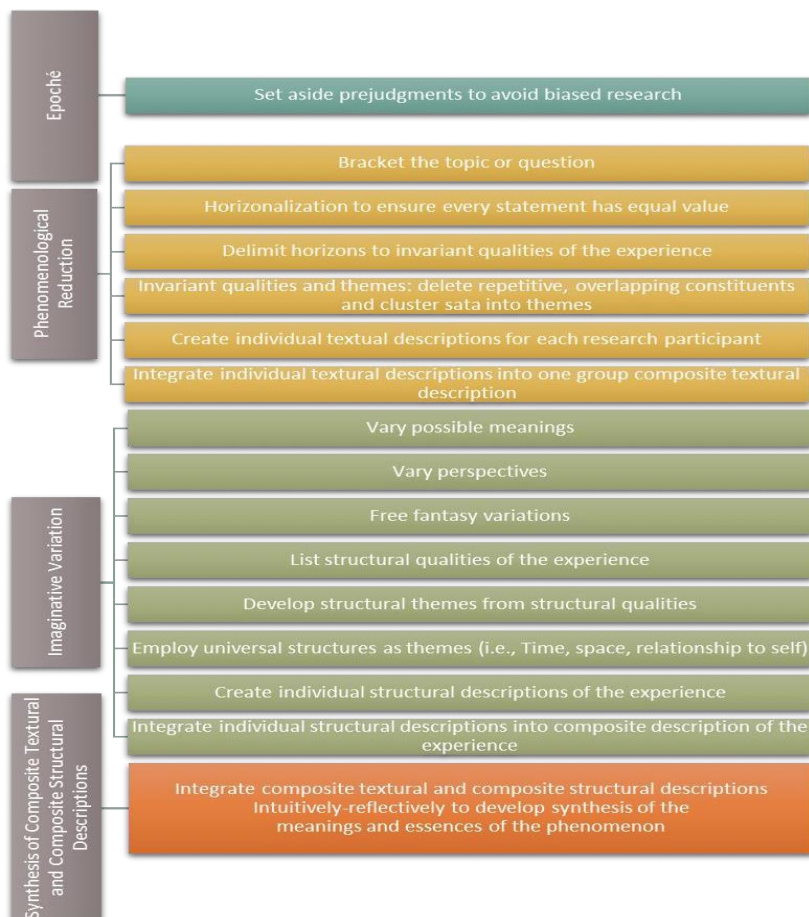
on a USB drive, which was stored and locked away in a cabinet of the researcher's home together with the printed and signed consent forms of the participants. Three years following the completion of the research study, the researcher will destroy the USB drive by crushing it and she will destroy the signed consent forms by shredding them.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis process in this phenomenological study, the researcher used the transcendental model by Moustakas (1994) to analyze the data that was collected in order to be able to focus on the essence of the lived experiences of the subject matter experts (see figure 5).

Figure 5

Data Analysis Using the Phenomenological Model, (Moustakas, 1994, p. 180– 182)



As stressed by Moran (2000), the researcher must be cautious when interpreting the meaning of the experience for those who participated in the research study, as they can be culturally completely different from the researcher's own culture (p.446). Therefore, bracketing was performed prior to conducting the data analysis. Then, the first cycle of coding took place. The researcher scanned the data for information that was relevant (Saldana, 2014). Generally, when using the transcendental phenomenological research method, the researcher must be very familiar with the data collected. This means the researcher had to read the transcribed interviews over and over, and scan for the initial relevant data. This relevant data is called horizons (Moustakas, 1997). Once the researcher scanned for initial relevant data, she went ahead and chose an additional method of coding, which supports the horizons. The researcher reduced the information into statements, and combined those statements into sub-themes. The sub-themes were created in order to describe the lived experience of the subject matter experts (Creswell, 2007). By looking for emerging themes, connections among the themes, and patterns, the researcher arrived at a detailed description of the phenomenon (Cooper, 2014).

According to Moustakas (1994), the detailed description of a phenomenon occurs in the form of a "unified statement of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (p. 200). With the transcendental method of phenomenology, according to Cooper (2014), the last step of the data analysis was to arrive at a "synthesis of description a meaning" (p.83).

Epoché or Bracketing

Bracketing was performed prior to conducting the individual interviews with the subject matter experts, as well as prior to analyzing the data. Bracketing was performed

in order for the researcher's biases, and therefore the way the researcher approached the interviewees, as well as how she analyzed the data, to not enter into the results of the study (Creswell, 1998). The researcher maintained a reflexive journal during the research process and prior to analyzing the data that was collected. She started the journal by writing down all preconceptions she had gained about human trafficking victims in general due to her profession and acknowledged that all her preconceptions were surrounding immigrant victims of human trafficking (Ahern, 1999). She accounted for all gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status biases she may have had about human trafficking victims prior to conducting the study. Further, she reflected on her personal value system and her place in the power hierarchy of the research as the participants were aware of her profession (Hanson, 1994).

The researcher then delineated the units of meaning, which allowed her to explicate the data.

Phenomenological Reduction

The data analysis process included the initial layer of coding and categorization. After conducting bracketing, the researcher reviewed all the transcripts maintaining an open mind, while considering the research questions. The researcher started to format the transcripts in NVivo 12 Plus software, looking for common themes among the transcripts and facilitate the coding process. By conducting horizontalization, the researcher was able to skim the data for horizons that stood out and form themes accordingly. Once 5 themes emerged, the researcher combined and refined the data, with overlap in mind and in doing so, she clustered potential sub-themes (Creswell, 2007). These sub-themes were represented as nodes in NVivo 12 Plus software. A set of initial sub-themes were formed

through descriptive coding in order to gain a better understanding of the participants lived experiences. To simplify the process and make it visually easier for the researcher to maintain a good overview about the data, the researcher assigned colors to every sub-theme. The researcher skimmed all of the transcripts and assigned the data to one of the five themes (coding), and from there to the individual sub-themes. The initial sub-themes and coding formed as the foundation for more elaborate codes. The final data analysis including linkages, mind mapping, and chart creation. The researcher ultimately eliminated redundant statements by each and every participant (Moustakas 1994). The last step was for the researcher to refine the themes and sub-themes and ensure the 19 sub-themes that emerged had credibility and were unique in their nature, allowing all data to be accounted for.

Imaginative Variation

Through imaginative variation, the structural qualities of the lived experiences were clustered into themes, which allowed the researcher to arrive at individual structural descriptions of how the participant perceived the experiences of the victims and survivor population they work with, as well as how they perceive conflicts and challenges they experience while working with this vulnerable population. The statements and themes that emerged from the data analysis formed the basis for the researcher's development of the textual descriptions of the participant's experiences (Creswell, 2007). The structural descriptions of the lived experiences were influenced by the phenomenological reduction process. The researcher concluded the findings of the study by writing a summary of the themes that emerged and the subject matter expert's experiences working with female sex trafficking victims, as well as the conflict and the challenges they experience when

working with this population (Hycner, 1999, Moustakas, 1994). According to Saldana and Adorno's (2001) view, the researcher compared the findings of the study with the already existing literature, as well as addressed whether the findings of this study were adequate, of importance, and recommendations were made how the findings of this study could be used by practitioners in their day to day work with the victim populations (Ryan et al., 2007).

Synthesis of Composite Textural and Composite Structural Description

The composite textual and structural statements that represent the subject matter experts shared lived experience, or also called the phenomenon in the study, provided the foundation for the researcher's reporting of the findings of the study. The essence of the phenomenon in this study, referring to the resilience in female sex trafficking victims is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the sensitive nature of the subject the expert matters reported on, the ethical aspects of this study were taken into consideration. The population the subject matter experts work with on a daily basis suffered a great deal of trauma in their lives making the topic a sensitive topic. Therefore, the researcher had to ensure that the data collected about this vulnerable population is not going to be abused, or used in any other way than advertised by the researcher. Due to the nature of the study, the researcher informed the participants to ensure they do not share any personal information with the researcher, nor any data that would lead to a potential identification of any of the victims and survivors they worked with (Adams, 2011).

Another ethical consideration the researcher took into consideration was the diversity of the subject matter experts she interviewed, as well as the different victim populations the subject matter experts work with. While some of the practitioners who participated in this study work strictly with immigrant victims of human trafficking, others worked strictly with victims who struggled with substance abuse issues, or victims who are underage and were arrested just to name a few differences among the populations the subject matter experts work with. Due to the diversity among the populations the subject matter experts work with, as well as the diversity of the subject matter experts themselves, the interview questions were formed to allow for the experiences of the diversity in the populations to be heard, in addition for the questions to be as simple as possible in nature, using the appropriate language for the participants to understand (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researcher self-disclosed that when she interpreted the data she collected, she acknowledging the reflection of her “cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics” she brings to the research study (Gilgun, 2005).

Another ethical aspect the researcher had to consider was how she wrote up the findings of the study, as she had to ensure that the participants nor the victims and survivor population are not negatively impacted in any way (Gilgun, 2005). Additionally, the way the researcher stored the data she collected was another important aspect, due to the sensitive nature of the study. Therefore, the researcher stored the data including the signed consent forms anonymously, in a locked, fire proof container, where the data collected remains for three years following the completion of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Validity, Reliability, and Quality Control

One of the strategies for validation in qualitative research is to corroborate evidence through the triangulation of multiple data sources that were discussed in the literature review, as indicated by Bazely (2013). In order to do so, the researcher corroborated her findings with evidence from different resources she elaborated on in the literature review section of this study, and which are annotated in the references section. This shed light onto the perspective of the findings and how these findings fit into previously conducted research in the field of sex trafficking (Bazely, 2013).

Another strategy for validation in qualitative research is to seek participant feedback (Bazely, 2013). The researcher shared the findings of the study with several participants who were interested in seeing the results of the study in order to seek the participant's views on the credibility of the findings and the interpretation of the data. While the study as a whole was not shared prior to completion, the researcher shared the findings that answered the initial research questions with several participants in order to get their feedback.

Both of the above-mentioned strategies appeared to be the right fit for this study, and the validation of this research study.

In order to build trust and greater credibility, prior to the completion of the study, 2 participants who asked to review the quotations of their transcribed interviews that the researcher was planning on using in chapter 4, were provided with the opportunity to review these quotations. The 2 participants who had requested to see the quotations of their transcribed interviews which the researcher was planning on using in chapter 4 were provided with an opportunity to review, add, and delete any data they felt was of

importance, or alternatively, was not relevant or accurately portrayed by the researcher (Van Manen, 1990). However, the 2 participants who had requested to see the transcribed quotations that the researcher was planning on using for chapter 4 of this study did not change their responses, but rather clarified them. This process did not pertain to the data analysis.

Due to the similarity in patterns and consistent answers, the researcher determined that the findings of this study are reliable. Further, the consistency and similarities in answers also allowed for the researcher to determine when the data was saturated, as after 9 interviews with the subject matter experts no new information was revealed (Fusch & Ness, 2015). While the researcher initially attempted to recruit 15 participants as the maximum number of participants as suggested by Creswell (2013), the researcher concluded 9 participants were sufficient to fulfill the purpose of this study.

The summary of the data collected, organized by the 5 emerging themes is presented in chapter 4. The data described in chapter 4 represents the subject matter experts' feelings, thoughts, emotions, perceptions, as well as the perception of any conflict they encounter when working with female sex trafficking victims.

Chapter 4: Results

This study was conducted in order to gain an understanding about the resilience in female sex trafficking victims. By interviewing practitioners who work with the diverse victim populations, the researcher explored the lived experiences of these subject matter experts with females, who survived getting trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. This chapter contains the findings that were obtained through the semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher in an aim to answer the following research questions:

- What are the factors that keep victims of human traffickers in their trafficking situation before they break free from their trafficker?
- What are the factors that enable victims of sex trafficking to break free from the trafficking situation?
- Was there a trigger experience for victims of sex trafficking that made them decide to break free from their trafficker? If so, of what nature?
- What are the factors that contribute to female sex trafficking survivor's healing from the experience of getting trafficked?

Additionally, this chapter contains participants' demographic profiles, in which the researcher uses tables to complement the research findings and provide an extra layer of context to the shared experiences of the subject matter experts, in which the shared experiences are analyzed and organized by themes and subthemes. The findings answer the research questions, and address the most fundamental conflict among female survivors of sex trafficking: How can a practitioner contribute to the resilience among this vulnerable population, and what can be done to prevent survivors of sex trafficking

from falling back into that life? Additionally, the findings of the semi-structured interviews that were conducted address how to promote and catalyze the ability to overcome the experience of being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Participant Profiles

All participants were assigned numbers in order to maintain their confidentiality. In order to preserve the participant's anonymity, researchers should assign participants of their study numbers or aliases for data analyzing and reporting purposes (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the researcher assigned the participants numbers, and the numbers were assigned in the order the researcher conducted the interviews. The numbers that were assigned have no correlation to the participants who were interviewed for this study; therefore it does not make them identifiable. The researcher conducted 9 semi-structured interviews for this transcendental phenomenological study. While the researcher aimed to conduct up to 15 semi-structured interviews for this transcendental phenomenological research study, after 9 interviews no new information or themes emerged. All participants possess extensive professional experience within their field. Several of the participants either possess advanced degrees, or are working towards advanced degrees. The researcher completed brief individual profiles of the participants, which facilitates a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. Additionally, the data collected allows for the reader to gain a better understanding of each and every individual conflict the participants face when working with the female sex trafficking victims and survivor population.

Participant 1

Participant 1 is a 72-year old male, who has worked as a licensed clinical social worker in South Florida for over 30 years. Participant 1 has his own practice in South Florida, in which he treats patients from various backgrounds and populations. Within his 30 years of working as a social worker, he has worked with the female sex trafficking victim and survivor population for about 25 years. Participant 1 mainly worked with domestically trafficked victims and survivors, and for the most part, they came to him due to alcohol and substance abuse problems, then later identified as victims or survivors of sex trafficking. Participant 1's educational background is a bachelor's degree in psychology, and a master's degree in social work.

When asked participant 1 about the most conflicting aspects he faces when helping female survivors of sex trafficking recover from their experience he shared:

The most conflicting and most challenging aspect I face when working with female sex trafficking survivors, is to help them stay clean and away from drugs and alcohol. When these survivors' relapse, then they go back to drugs and alcohol, they also often put themselves back into dangerous situations in which they risk getting re-trafficked.

Participant 2

Participant 2 is a female who currently serves as the director of a halfway house in South Florida, which attends to women who are recovering from alcohol and substance abuse. Among the females she attended over the course of 4 years, female sex trafficking victims and survivors showed up due to their alcohol and substance abuse problems. However, they did not immediately identified as survivors of sex trafficking. Participant

2 did not encounter any females who were trafficked internationally, therefore participant 2's working experience is working with domestically trafficked females who have drug and alcohol addiction problems. Participant 2 is a high school graduate who attended some college classes, and she holds several certifications related to working with people who have alcohol and substance abuse problems. She completed certifications as a recovery coach, recovery support specialist, recovery resident administrator, and interventionist.

When asked participant 2 what she perceives as the most conflicting aspect of helping female survivors of sex trafficking recover, she replied:

The female sex trafficking survivors I worked with had co-occurring addictions.

My biggest conflict I face when working with this population is to be compassionate for what these women have been through, yet at the same time not enable their addictions.

Participant 3

Participant 3 is a female who currently works as the case manager for a non-profit organization in South Florida. She serves as the case manager for human trafficking victims who have alcohol and drug addiction issues in addition to being victims of human trafficking. Participant 3 has worked with the female sex trafficking population for 2 years in her current position as a case manager for a non-profit group. She has worked with female sex trafficking victims who were trafficked domestically, as well as with victims who were trafficked internationally or are immigrant victims of trafficking. Participant 3 holds a bachelor's degree in psychology.

When asked participant 3 about the conflict she faces when helping female survivors of sex trafficking recover from their experience, she expressed: “I experience the most conflict when I’m helping these women get over their substance abuse issues at the same time as helping them recover from their experience of getting trafficked and sexually exploited”.

Participant 4

Participant 4 is female social worker, who has worked with female victims of trafficking for 5 years in different capacities; as a shelter manager within a homeless shelter for women and working as program director of the human trafficking program of non-profit group that assists victims of human trafficking. Participant 4’s educational background is a bachelor’s degree in social work, and she is currently working towards her master’s degree in marriage and family therapy.

When asked participant 4 about the biggest conflict she faces when helping female survivors of sex trafficking recover from their experience, she replied:

They come with an umbrella of problems. Some need visas, and paperwork. They need help believing in themselves again and in the opportunity to live a different life and they need to overcome addiction problems. They require a lot of therapy in order to get a fresh start at life.

Participant 5

Participant 5 is a female who has been working with female sex trafficking victims and survivors for 7 years, and who is currently working as a victims advocate for a non-profit organization in South Florida. Prior to her current position, she has also served as a case manager for female sex trafficking victims and survivors. Participant 5

mainly worked with domestically trafficked females but also came across several internationally trafficked females, or immigrant victims of sex trafficking. Participant 5s educational background is a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in translation English-Spanish.

When asked participant 5 what the biggest conflict is she faces when helping female survivors of sex trafficking recover from their experience, she stated:

Working with sex trafficking survivors is always challenging. The biggest challenge I face working with this population is the way they perceive themselves and their goals. Most survivors are shattered, and have internalized the lies the trafficker and others told them, so the survivors do not see themselves as capable of leaving this lifestyle. It is very hard to break the cycle and to help them grow independently.

Participant 6

Participant 6 is a female who has been working with female survivors of sex trafficking for 7 years in her role as the director of women's services for a non-profit groups providing transitional housing and program support for women in need.

Participant 6 mainly worked with domestically trafficked females, but also came across several internationally trafficked females or female immigrant victims of sex trafficking during the course of the past seven years. Participant 6's holds a bachelor's degree in criminology.

When asked participant 6 about the biggest is she faces when helping female survivors of sex trafficking recover from their experience, she expressed: "The biggest

challenge I face when working with this population is having these women realize their self-worth and not return to controlling relationships”.

Participant 7

Participant 7 is a female, who has been working with the female sex trafficking population for 7 years. In her role as an attorney for a non-profit organization in South Florida, she helps victims of all forms of trafficking obtain their legal documentation in the United States. Therefore, participant 7 works with immigrant victims of human trafficking. Participant 7 holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a juris doctor.

When asked participant 7 about the biggest conflict she faces when helping female survivors of sex trafficking recover from their experience, she stated:

The most conflicting aspect of my work is the amount of time it takes from application for a visa until the survivor's receives her visa; it can take up to 2 years. Sometimes they get permission to stay, which is temporary. But if they do not get that then they have to wait. Without this authorization they cannot find good work and can get into another trafficking like situation. They need this authorization in order to find good employment. Also, at times we get referred victims from outside our usual geographic work area and then it oftentimes becomes challenging to connect them with the social services they desperately need.

Participant 8

Participant 8 is a female, who has been working with female sex-trafficking victims and survivors for 6 years in her role as the clinical director of a secure intensive mental health facility within the Department of Justice. She also serves as the executive

director of a non-profit organization that advocates for victims of all forms of human trafficking. Participant 8 mainly deals with domestically trafficked victims and survivors. Participant 8's educational background is a bachelor's degree in law and society with a minor in forensic psychology, and a master's degree in counseling with specialization in forensic psychology.

When asked participant 8 about the biggest conflict she faces when helping female victims and survivors of sex trafficking recover from their experience, she expressed:

The biggest challenge for me is to get through to the victims and face their denial about being victims. The victims have a hard time accepting the reality of their situation. For get them to identify with being victims of human trafficking is very difficult. It is also very difficult as far as resources as it is not easy to get their record expunged or their name changed. A lot of systemic problems make it very difficult for the girls to recover. There is not much there for them. Girls are reported to the FBI, then they go to jail, and then come out go right back to the same people who trafficked them in the first place.

Participant 9

Participant 9 is a female who has worked with female victims and survivors of sex trafficking for 15 years in various roles; as case manager, as program manager overseeing federally funded programs and outreach programs with the goal of identifying survivors, as the deputy director of a non-governmental program supervising two trafficking programs in different parts of Florida. Currently, and she currently works as a technical advisor for a global humanitarian anti-trafficking program in the United States and

Europe. Participant 9's educational background is a bachelor's degree in international studies with a minor in criminology, a master's degree in international administration, and a doctoral degree in conflict analysis and resolution.

When asked participant 9 about the biggest conflict she faces when helping female victims and survivors of sex trafficking recover from their experience, she replied:

The biggest challenge for me when working with female victims and survivors of sex trafficking is gaining their trust. I think that was what led them into this situation in the first place. They felt the trafficker could provide whatever it is that they were missing and the trafficker promised. These women and girls trusted the wrong people. Then we are coming in as an outsider trying to help them, maybe being a different gender speaking a different language, then that does not always resonate with them. The victims are from 42 different countries, speaking 32 different languages, why trust us after going through all this? That is the biggest challenge I face when provided with this opportunity; to show them that we are there to walk along side of them and provide them with the opportunity to a new start of their journey.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

	Gender	Work Experience in years	Work Capacity	Highest Degree earned
Participant 1	Male	25	Social Worker	Master's Degree in Social work
Participant 2	Female	4	Director of a halfway house for recovering addicts	High School Degree / some college
Participant 3	Female	2	Case Manager	Bachelor's Degree in Psychology
Participant 4	Female	5	Program Administrator	Bachelor's Degree in Social Work
Participant 5	Female	7	Victim Advocate	Master's Degree in Spanish-English Translation
Participant 6	Female	7	Director of Woman's Services for a non-profit organization	Bachelor's Degree in Criminology
Participant 7	Female	7	Attorney for a non- profit organization	Juris Doctor
Participant 8	Female	6	Clinical Director of a mental health facility within the Department of Justice	Master's Degree in Counseling
Participant 9	Female	15	Technical Advisor for a global humanitarian anti- trafficking program in the United States and Europe	Doctoral Degree in Conflict Analysis & Resolution

The collective experiences of the participants show that the some of the most difficult and conflicting aspect of helping female survivors of sex trafficking is getting them to start believing in themselves and awaken the survivors' resilience within them; getting them to adapt to a different way of self-view and realize that there is another life for them out there if they wish. In order to help victims go through the transition from being victims to becoming a survivors, getting the victims to trust the practitioners is oftentimes the first major conflict the practitioners face, since trusting the wrong people has placed them in the position of getting trafficked and sexually exploited in the first place. It also appears to be challenging for practitioner to get these survivors to open up to them about their experiences, which takes for them to first start to trust the practitioners. Also, a very challenging part of the process is the patience practitioners require for not only working with this population, but also for the some of the processes, such as the time it takes for the legal processes. Additionally, the trust issues of the victims are also a problem the participants who work with this population experience. Trust issues are also the reason why some of these women and girls do not always immediately identify as survivors of sex trafficking.

The shared experiences of the participants also indicate that internationally trafficked females face different challenges than domestically trafficked females. While internationally trafficked females are mostly trafficked with the promise of employment in the United States, they face different challenges than domestically trafficked females once they are able to leave the trafficking situation. Language barriers, the time it takes to get them their work visas to legally stay and work in the United States, finding financial support for them while they are waiting for their visas, and helping the victims and

survivors free themselves from the guilt and obligation they feel to send money back to their families in their home countries, these are some of the challenges practitioners reported they face when working with internationally trafficked females or immigrant female of sex trafficking.

Recovering from substance abuse problems also plays a significant challenge among the recovery of female sex trafficking victims. The participants shared lived experiences indicate that substance abuse plays mostly a factor among domestically trafficked females. Drug and alcohol abuse may play a factor in internationally trafficked females; however it is usually not the reason for these women to get trafficked from a foreign country into the United States, and while it may play a role in controlling them once they are in the United States, using their immigration status against them, and the fear of deportation tend to be the way traffickers control these victims. However, for those who are addicted to drugs and alcohol, for them to recover from sex trafficking, they must be able to stay away from drugs and alcohol, which is an important aspect of their recovery. Getting through to the survivors and making them understand that they do not need the drug or the alcohol is another big challenge practitioners face. In the end, it is the survivors who themselves need to do the work and stay clean from drugs and alcohol, wanting to live a different life. It is not a choice that anyone else can make for them. See figures 6 & 7 for the 5 themes and 19 sub-themes as they emerged throughout the coding process.

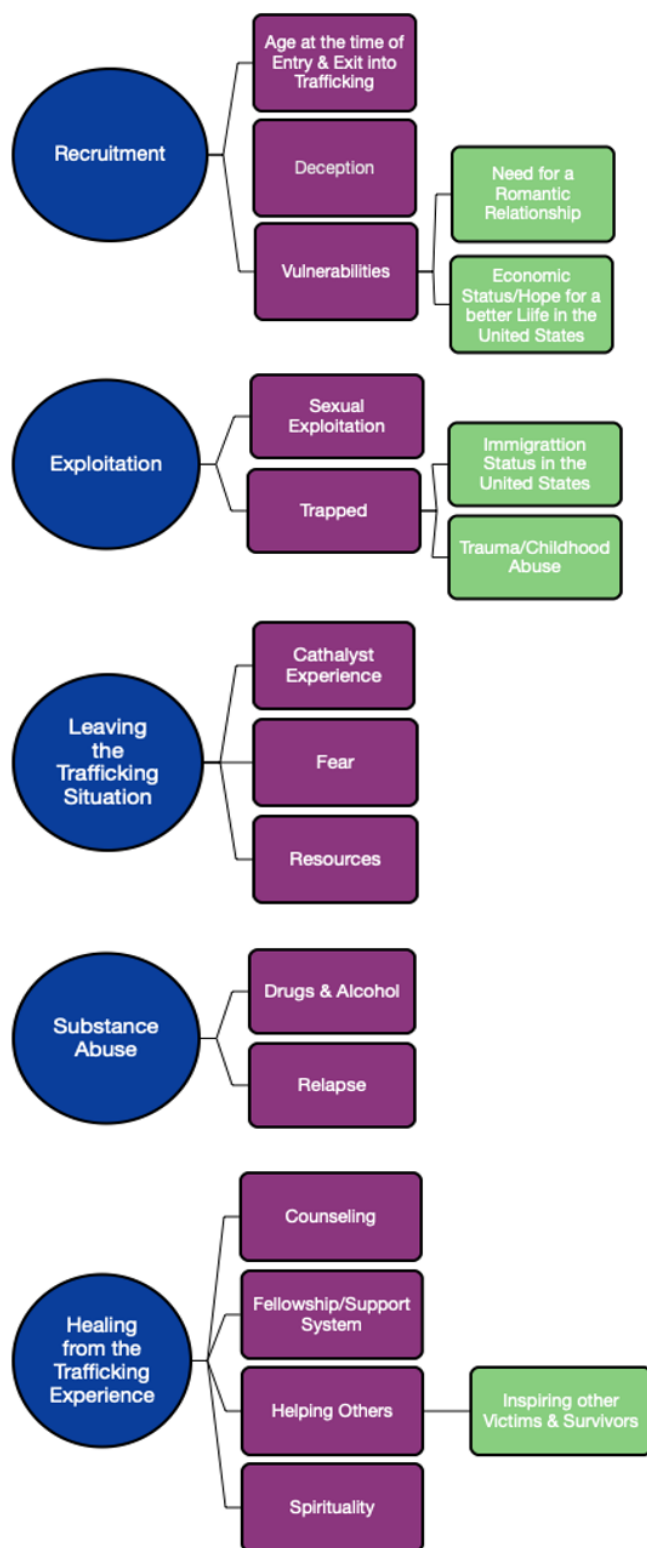
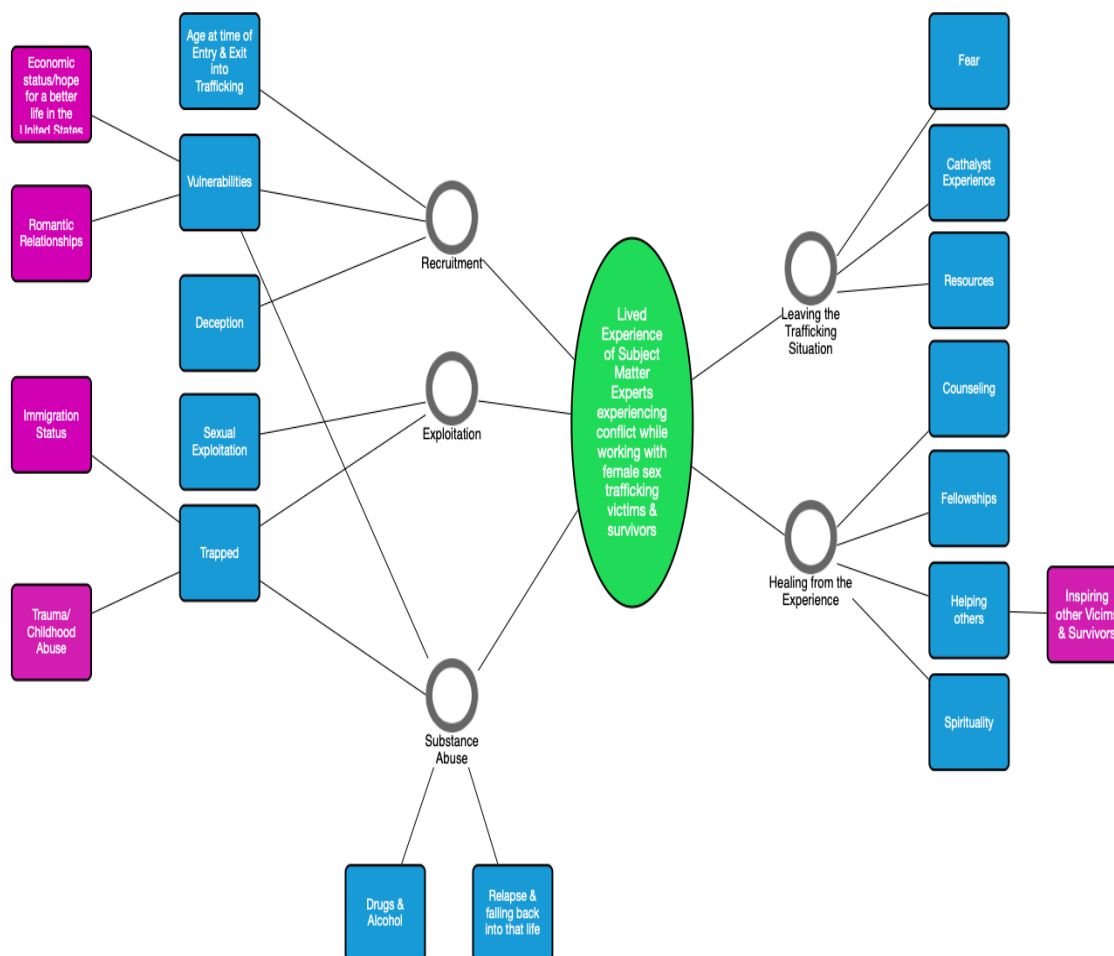
Figure 6*Emerging Themes & Emerging Sub-Themes*

Figure 7*Thematic Coding Mind Map*

The analysis of the 5 themes that emerged gave rise to 19 sub-themes, and a thematic structure that developed from the participants perceptions about the female sex trafficking victims and survivor population as seen in figure 3, Thematic Coding Mind Map in NVivo 12 Plus software. The sub-theme “*Substance Abuse*” emerged as a theme that stands apart from the other themes, but shows to have ties to two of the other themes that emerged when analyzing the data from the interviews conducted. This thematic structure displays the connections among the themes, and subthemes, and are discussed during the analysis of the data collection.

Theme 1 – Recruitment

The first theme that emerged during the data analysis was *Recruitment*. Eight out of 9 participants stated that the victims and survivors they have worked with were recruited into working in the commercial sex industry, while only one participant reported that the victims she worked with were kidnapped and forced to work in the commercial sex industry. The participants who reported that the victims she worked with were kidnapped works with sex trafficking victims and survivors whose underlying issue is alcohol and substance abuse, and these victims were kidnapped by either their drug dealer, or a drug dealer. The remaining 8 participants reported that the majority of the victims and survivor population they work with were recruited into working in the commercial sex industry. Only a very small portion of the victims were already working in the commercial sex industry before they were trafficked and were lured in with the promise of being able to make more money than they were already making, or by being able to work in the United States as exotic dancers where they could make more money than working in the commercial sex industry abroad. Every one of the 8 practitioners, who reported that the victims and survivors they work with were recruited, reported that the recruitment process can take on many forms, and but in every instance the victims were recruited to work for the trafficker and the recruiter made it attractive for the victims to work for the trafficker whether it was through making them believe in having found love, or a good job, or being able to make more money. Also, out of 9 participants, 7 reported that the female sex trafficking victims and survivors they worked with recruited others into that life.

In particular, the recruitment process of victims to recruit other victims was explained by participant 8 as follows:

I would say it is a common thing for girls to recruit other girls, but it depends on the personality. If a girl did not want to have sex with the john, then the trafficker would tell them to recruit other girls, otherwise it was them who have to have sex with the john. So then the girls would go recruit and kind of do the dirty work. They would also play some more authoritarian roles and maybe hold the weapon at gunpoint or run things within the organization. These girls would become the right hand “man” of the recruiter.

Participant 9 shared why female sex trafficking victims would recruit their friends or other females into sex trafficking:

It becomes obvious when you see a raid and there is a group of 10 survivors and one aligns herself to be the girlfriend of the trafficker. This one person would rather just have sex with the recruiter because it was the lesser of two evils to just have sex with the recruiter and also be in charge of recruitment. This becomes obvious when all the victims get out the trafficking situation, and all of them are victims but nine victims do not want to have anything to do with victim no. 10, because she inflicted some harm as well.

Overall, most participants reported that the victims they worked with were recruited to work in the commercial sex industry – whether it was by another victim who recruited them or by the trafficker him or herself.

When questioned participant 5 whether the victims she worked with were recruited into the commercial sex industry, she shared:

I would say 99% of the girls were recruited. One of the girls I was working with was already working at a strip club. But the majority of the victims were recruited for the purpose of exploitation. Once recruited themselves, they are sometimes forced to recruit others, or have the pressure to make money and then offer to recruit, bring their friends and make more money.

Participant 3 reported that victims recruit other victims frequently, in particular, she explained:

Absolutely, victims recruit other victims. One of the victims I worked with was a ring leader. The “main bitch” they called her. She was the main girlfriend of the trafficker. Many times they recruit other victims. Many do it whether young or old and it is so evil.

Participant 4 expressed that most of the victims she worked with recruited other victims and shared “The majority of the victims and survivors I have worked with recruited more than one person into that life”.

Out of the theme *Recruitment*, 3 key sub-themes surfaced; *Age at the Time of Entry and Exit into Trafficking*, *Deception*, and *Vulnerabilities*.

Age at the Time of Entry and Exit into Trafficking

One of the key themes that emerged from *Recruitment* was the age at which the victims were trafficked. All 9 participants reported that the majority of the victims they worked with were either underage, or in their early twenties when they were recruited by the traffickers. While the participants reported that there are exceptions to the majority being in that age range at the time of recruitment, they also stated they encountered victims who were recruited in their mid to late twenties. At the same time, 8 out of 9

participants reported that the majority of the female sex trafficking survivors they worked with are in their late twenties or early thirties when they leave the sex trafficking situation. While the subject matter experts reported that there are some exceptions with trafficking survivors being in their late thirties when they leave the trafficking situation, the majority of survivors tend to be in their mid to late twenties at the time they exit that life. Due to the nature of participant 8 profession, as she works within the mental health division of a juvenile correctional facility, participant 8 reported that all the victims she worked with were underage at the time they were recruited by a trafficker. She further reported that they are in their early twenties by the time the victims are able to leave the trafficking situation.

When asked about whether the traffickers are generally aware of whether the victims are underage at the time of recruitment, participant 4 reported: “The victims may be minors and the traffickers are fully aware of that but do not care”.

When questioned participant 3 about whether the traffickers are aware of whether the victims are underage at the time of recruitment, participant 3 replied:

Some of the girls start when they are teenagers, others are kidnaped, or they are coerced into that life, then sometimes they stay once in the life. What I did notice though is that the traffickers are always much older than the victims. About 10 years older and upwards. I would say there’s a 15 years difference in age on average. And yes, the traffickers are always aware of the victims’ age.

Participant 5 also reported that traffickers are aware of the age of their victims.

She expressed:

Yes, yes, and yes. It is like the first thing the traffickers ask their victims. They know very well about the age of their victims. Something else I noticed is that once the victims are in love with the trafficker, they tell them their true age even if they did not tell them up front, so the traffickers are fully aware of their victim's age.

Participant 8, who has been working with the underage victim population shared:

“The recruiters are usually the same age as the victims, for example, they could be friends in school”.

Participant 8 also reported:

The youngest victims I worked with was 11 years old and the oldest was 18 years old. They usually fall somewhere between the age range of 12 and 14 years old. Depends on what stage in the process they came into the correctional facility. Some of them had already been trafficked for 5 years by the time they came into the correctional facility.

Participant 4 reported that many of the victims she worked with were recruited when they were underage. In particular, she expressed: “Usually the victims are in their early twenties, or even teenagers at the time they were recruited. The victims may be minors and the traffickers are fully aware of it but do not care”.

Deception

Deception as a theme surfaced during the theme *Recruitment*, as 8 out of 9 participants reported that deception always plays a factor in the recruitment process of the victims. Participant 2 reported that recruitment and deception did not take place with the

female survivors she works with because they were all kidnapped into trafficking due to being drug addicts. However, the remaining 8 participants reported that deception is always used in some form and that none of the victims knowingly go into the trafficking situation, being fully aware of what is coming. Deception is always used to lure them in. While not all victims are lured in the same way, there are always promises made, and hopes created by the trafficker. The promises a trafficker makes can be anything from a better life, to a good job, or by giving the victims the impression they found love and a romantic relationship.

When participant 3 was asked whether deception was part of the recruitment process, participant 3 elaborated: “Usually, traffickers apply guerilla pimping; it is always manipulation and abuse. Almost all of the victims have been involved with the trafficker romantically and believed the false promises the traffickers made”.

When participant 5 was asked whether deception played a part in the recruitment process with the victims she worked with, participant 5 replied:

The victims never knew up what was coming up front. Deception was always used to recruit them. Until up to this day the victims refer to their pimps or trafficker as their boyfriends. Most of them had no idea they were even trafficked. They had no idea that this was coming.

When participant 8 expressed that deception always played a role in the recruitment process, participant 8 shared:

Deception was always used to recruit them. Some girls were already working at strip clubs or they were Instagram models. They were frequently recruited through social media, by making them believe they will be models. Also they

were frequently recruited by making them believe they would become singers or famous in some way, having found a way to make it in the music industry. The victims often thought they would be provided with an opportunity to be singers.

When participant 9 was asked whether deception was part of the recruitment process, participant 9 expressed:

Most of the time deception is used. You will see that fraud and coercion is most frequently used. In situations where someone is already in the industry, then it is deception that is used to lure them in, such as the romantic piece or the opportunity to make more money. Nobody gets into a trafficking situation voluntarily knowing what is coming. Sometimes victims work with a pimp or trafficker and there was some abuse that came into play. The aspect of kidnapping is very rare. Most of them are forced or tricked into the situation. Initially, they may have walked into the situation voluntarily. Internationally trafficked victims sometimes know they are expected to work in the commercial sex industry, but they do not know the extent of what is expected from them upon arrival in the United States. Even if they knew, then they became victims of a crime and it is less likely for them to come forward because they knew to some degree what was coming. Then we see others who thought they would be working in restaurants or the like, then end up getting trafficked and held against their will.

Participant 4 reported: “The victims were not aware of what they were getting themselves into. They were lured in by the traffickers, they believed into being offered a better life, or a romantic relationship”.

Participant 1 expressed that the victims he worked with were all deceived into the trafficking situation. When asked whether deception played a role in the recruitment process participant 1 replied: “All the victims and survivors I worked with were deceived into the trafficking situation. They were romanced and seduced. They believed in romance and the promise of commitment”.

Vulnerabilities

Vulnerabilities of the victims were reported by all 9 participants as it emerged as a theme that played a major factor in the ability of the traffickers to recruit their victims. If the victims were not vulnerable in the first place, traffickers would not be able to recruit them. The victims’ vulnerabilities make them prey for the traffickers. The victims are generally vulnerable due to factors, such as child abuse, child neglect, economic status, or drug and alcohol addiction. If they would not be vulnerable then traffickers would not be able to recruit their victims. All 9 participants reported that the victims they worked with were vulnerable in some area of their life which made them targets for recruiters and traffickers who exploited these vulnerabilities.

When questioned participant 3 about how traffickers are able to recruit their victims, she replied:

A lot of people do not know that human trafficking does not mean victims are chained up and coerced. Sometimes people who do not work in the commercial sex industry do not know where the force is coming from that keeps victims in that predicament. People cannot understand that individuals can be groomed to the point that victims are not aware they are victims. It is very difficult for people to understand.

When questioned participant 4 about how traffickers recruit their victims, she expressed:

Most traffickers lure their victims in through a romantic relationships. But it depends, as traffickers identify the need of a victim they act upon that need, and make efforts to fill whatever void the victims have, or pretend to fill that void. Since there was a need, the victims believe that their feelings are true.

When questioned participant 9 about how traffickers recruit their victims, she shared:

The recruiter would be the trafficker, the all-in-one person and main exploiter. But this person could as well be a family member, for example a parent who gives his or her child to a landlord or somebody else for drugs or free rent. The trafficker could also be a friend in school suggesting to them to make some money modeling or that a friend of theirs is someone they should meet. The trafficker is usually someone who is in their trusted circle, like someone from the same town if it is abroad. Someone who tells them about a better life in the United States. It could be anyone who is aware of their vulnerabilities and can prey on their vulnerabilities. Vulnerabilities could be self-esteem, substance abuse, or anything really.

When participant 3 was asked how traffickers recruit their victims, and what factors played a role she stated:

A common denominator is that the girls the traffickers recruit are already victims of something else, such as child abuse, sexual abuse, or child neglect. They are

hurt and weak minded in some way. The traffickers are able to spot that that weakness. These victims never had anything to build on in the first place.

Participant 5, responded: “Girls who are trafficked are vulnerable and 99 % of them have been abused in the past, so they did not have a good support system from early on, which makes them become easy targets for traffickers”.

Two additional sub-themes emerged from the theme *Vulnerabilities*; the first sub-theme is the *Need for a Romantic Relationship* as it was reported by 8 out of 9 participants. The second sub-theme is *Economic status and the Hope for a better Life in the United States* as it was reported by 7 out of 9 participants. The latter is mainly the need of internationally trafficked victims, who are recruited into believing that they will have the chance to earn more money and make a better living by coming to the United States. Domestically trafficked victims tend to have a void when it comes to romantic relationships and belonging. Their bond to the trafficker tends to be rather an emotional bond, while internationally trafficked victims do not tend to share this strong emotional bond with the trafficker. While there is not rule that fits all, the findings of this study show the trends for internationally trafficked victims’ vulnerabilities differ than those who are domestically trafficked.

The theme *Need for a Romantic Relationship* showed that most domestically trafficked victims were lured in with the hope they will be in a romantic relationship with the trafficker. They were romanced and believed in finding love. Then once they are in love with the pimp, they are forced into prostitution.

When asked participant 5 how the trafficker was related to the victims she worked with, she replied:

For the most part through romantic relationships. I feel that the traffickers are so smart; they get their victims to do all sorts of things. They are usually approached in a romantic way via social media, or via friends, then they were pursued. Some were not even interested they tell me, but they were pursued so much and these traffickers tell the girls whatever they need to hear. They are so persistent until the girls fall in love with them. These girls are like a prey to the traffickers.

Participant further expressed: “In 90% of the victims I worked with ended up getting trafficked through a romantic relationships. The pimp was their boyfriend, or pretended to be their boyfriend”.

When participant 6 was asked how the trafficker was related to the victims she worked with, she expressed: “From what the victims and survivors I work with reported, the traffickers were all related to them through romantic relationships”.

When asked how the trafficker was related to the victims and survivors he worked with, participant 1 stated: “I am not sure about every victim and survivor I worked with, but for the most part the majority were recruited through a romantic relationship with a pimp”.

When asked participant 3 about how the traffickers were related to the victims she worked with she stated: “Usually, the recruiter played a Romeo-type persona, such as the role of a boyfriend”.

Participant 4 was questioned about the relationship between the traffickers and the victims she worked with, and she also reported romantic relationships are usually used to access the victims. In pertinent part, Participant 4 explained: “The recruiter usually gains

access to the victims through dating, they try to play the closest friend or a boyfriend type of role”.

Participant 2 replied: “In the halfway house I run, one survivor I work with was recruited through her boyfriend, who turned out to be a pimp. It did not start that way that is what it turned into”.

Participant 2 added that most of the victims she works with were kidnapped into being trafficked due to their addiction to drugs and alcohol. She shared:

They women I worked with were usually kidnapped into trafficking, or they were recruited in order to get drugs and alcohol. They were not already working in the commercial sex industry, it was usually their drug dealer or a drug dealer who either recruited them or kidnapped them.

The second sub-theme *Economic Status* and *Hope for a better Life in the United States* emerged during the coding of the semi-structured interviews and when trying to define the vulnerabilities of female sex trafficking victims. Internationally trafficked victims tend to be recruited by traffickers who make them believe that they will be able to gain employment in the United States, and will make more money by working in the United States. When asked about the vulnerabilities of female sex trafficking victims, participant 4 stated:

Female sex trafficking victims get into the situation not knowing what is coming.

They usually fall in love with the trafficker, or believe that they will have an opportunity for a better life in the United States when trafficked from abroad.

Also participant 9 reported that sometimes the vulnerabilities overlap. When asked about how the trafficker was related to the victims, participant 9 replied:

Sometimes there's an overlap but domestically it is usually a romantic relationship. You will also see that with foreign nationals, getting trafficked seems to have more to do with employment situations, while domestically trafficked victims tend to have more of an emotional bond they share with the traffickers.

When asked participant 7 how the trafficker was related to the victims, participant 7 expressed: "Sometimes, the trafficker is a romantic partner who then forces the individual into taking on clients for sex work. But often there is no romantic involvement with the trafficker. Most victims are defrauded into a situation of trafficking".

Participant 6 reported:

I came across internationally trafficked women who felt a strong obligation to continue working in the sex trade in order to be able to send money to their family members they support in their native countries. Trying to relieve them of that guilt and obligation together with some language challenges they face at times has been difficult. This is what differs from victims who were domestically trafficked.

These women were lured in by the traffickers with the promise of good employment in the United States.

When participant 5 was asked whether she has come across internationally trafficked victims, and whether she observed that their vulnerabilities are different from domestically trafficked victims, she replied:

I worked with two clients who were brought in from abroad. Both were lured into believing they would get good employment in the United States. They were definitely more vulnerable because they didn't know the resources available for

them and they did not speak English and thought no one would believe their story. In addition, they were afraid of getting deported. The challenges we faced with these clients were finding financial resources for them while they were waiting for their visas, finding odd jobs and other things for them for the time they were waiting for their visas. My agency supported them but it would take up to 2 years for them to get their (T visa).

Participant 3 shared:

I think romantic relationships do not play a factor that often when it comes to internationally trafficked females. But just the essence that they do not know anything about the United States and the laws, customs, and culture here along with the trauma; it is harder for them to adapt to the country and overcome the trafficking situation than for victims who are U.S Citizens. Another observation I made is that when clients know that they can get free housing or they know several organizations help with paying their rents while they are homeless, poor, or are a human trafficking victims, then they may end up living off of these benefits instead of using them for a fresh start and to get back on their feet. So since they never get their lives together, they end up living off of these benefits jumping from one organization to the next and never end up doing the work to get back on their feet financially as well as emotionally and mentally. Sometimes they will go back to the pimp while they are jumping around and again never reintegrate into society like a normal citizen. Recovering from trafficking is difficult, sometimes it includes substance abuse, PTSD, complex trauma, financial strains, loneliness, confusion on how to do things, so sometimes it is easier to give up and live off of the

system. There is a system in the US that takes care of people. Some clients know how to use it, and some clients abuse it. Internationally trafficked clients usually have no idea this system even exists, they do not know food stamps even exist since they know nothing about the United States. So they end up working harder to get back on their feet and working through the emotional turmoil they experienced or the drug addiction because they feel like they do not have another choice. They feel they have to push every day to survive or they would become homeless. They try to stay employed and try to find housing; they push through counseling and try to become stable. These are just some of the experiences I made, but this is not to say that all domestically trafficked clients abuse the system. Just if it happens, then it usually happens with clients who were trafficked domestically and who are not immigrant victims of sex trafficking.

Theme 2 – Exploitation

Exploitation emerged as a theme, as every victim the participants have worked with was exploited by a trafficker or pimp. All 9 participants reported that the victims get exploited by the traffickers. In particular with domestically trafficked victims, the traffickers always exploited the victims' vulnerabilities during the recruitment period or what is also called "the grooming process", in which the traffickers groom their victims into doing things for them, the victims would have never imagined they would ever do. With internationally trafficked victims, the traffickers tend to pretend they have jobs lined up for the victims once they arrive in the United States. However, when victims were lured in through romantic relationships, their feelings are real, and they believe the traffickers' feelings are real too. They do not realize that the traffickers actually exploit

their vulnerabilities. Internationally trafficked victims may not have been lured in through romantic relationships, but they were vulnerable to the traffickers due to their social or economic status, and believed that they could have a better life by coming to the United States. Once they arrive in the United States, the trafficker exploits this vulnerability of theirs and uses their immigration status against them, as they are often not legally present and authorized to work in the United States. This allows for traffickers to easily control victims they traffic into the country.

Sexual Exploitation

A sub-theme that emerged from exploitation is *Sexual Exploitation*. All 9 participants reported that the victims ultimately end up getting exploited in the commercial sex industry. Some of the victims may have already worked in the commercial sex industry, or may have agreed to work as exotic dancers upon arrival in the United States if they are trafficked into the country from abroad. Perhaps, a pimp made it lucrative for them to work for the pimp instead of working for themselves if they were already working in the commercial sex industry. However, none of the victims expect to get into a situation in which they are forced to take on clients and unable to leave when they wish.

The sub-theme *Sexual Exploitation* emerged when coding the data, highlighting that some of the main patterns of the traffickers are to have their victims work at strip clubs, or they arrange dates for them at places, such as hotels. They also frequently advertise victims on websites, similar to “Backpage”, then arrange for dates through the websites. All traffickers and pimps appear that they look at their victims as a means of property; by selling them over and over and keeping the profits for themselves.

When questioned participant 4 about where the victims she worked with were forced to work, how many clients they had to take on daily, or what type of services they had to provide, participant 4 expressed:

Usually they work at strip clubs. The trafficker would also arrange meetings for the night so they had to work as escorts. The victims had to perform every service that was requested by the clients. I do not know how many clients they had to serve per night, but I know it is more than one. Some of my clients had to make a certain amount of money before they could return home. To the traffickers all that matters is the money. As long as a girl still looks good, she can work.

When asked participant 3 about where the victims were forced to work, how many clients they had to serve daily, and what type of services they had to provide, participant 3 explained:

All of them were essentially working in the commercial sex industry, however to my knowledge, most of them use the internet to get clients. Sites like “Backpage”, and Facebook, would be used. Also, sometimes they work out of private homes and brothels. The services they have to provide depends on the demand.

Sometimes it may just be stripping, other times it is full prostitution. I never ask them how many clients they had to serve on a daily basis because I know they have to serve many. As far as numbers, I once took a client to the doctor and she stated that and in a six-month period she had 86 clients, but I believes she downsized it. Another client told me that 30 johns per day would be the maximum she could tolerate.

When asked participant 7 about where the victims she worked with were forced to work, how many clients they had to serve daily, and what type of services they had to provide, participant 7 said:

Many sex trafficking victims work at strip clubs. Some work in clubs that have rooms for the purpose of sex work or are forced to perform sex work in hotels. Many traffickers use the internet - pages similar to “Backpage” and Craigslist to advertise sex trafficking victims. Once the trafficker found someone interested in the victim, they would then force that victim to perform services. I’ve seen a variety of how many clients they had to take on a daily basis. I’ve seen as little as three or as many as seven depending on the individual and circumstances.

Participant 1 expressed:

The victims and survivors I worked with usually worked at strip clubs or residences. They had to provide whatever services were requested and take on as many clients as they had to I would say. I do not know about a specific number of clients per day.

Participant 5 reported:

Once the traffickers have their prey, they can do anything with them. The clients who made the most money advertised online. I heard of websites like “Backpage”, but there are multiple sites. Generally, they have to do every service that is requested from them. I had a girl who said the pimp told her she had to take on 5 clients per day. But it depends on the girl. It is definitely multiple clients per day.

Participant 8 expressed:

Most of the girls I worked with worked at strip clubs. That would definitely be the majority of the girls. They had to do whatever was requested from them. All the way to services of crazy fetishes, like foot fetishes and stuff like that.

When questioned participant 9 about where the victims she worked with were forced to work, she explained:

The victims are oftentimes advertised online; they work in hotels or brothels, but in the last few years the trend has been online. Also, working on the street, in migrant labor camps, massage parlors, or strip clubs happens frequently. These women have to do whatever services are asked from them. Sometimes the aspects depend on the clientele. It is kind of a mix. As far as how many clients they had to serve on an average, I've heard of 6-12 per day, but I also heard of numbers like 20 clients per day and up, in particular on weekends.

Trapped

All 9 participants reported that the victims they worked with were trapped in the sex trafficking situation. The duration of the victims' entrapment varied. Generally, internationally trafficked victims tend to be trapped in the trafficking situation due to fear of deportation, because they are not familiar with the country and the system, and because they had to first figure out who they could possibly turn to in order to escape or come up with a plan to escape. They also faced the problem of not speaking English. On the contrary, domestically trafficked victims tend to be trapped due to an emotional bond they share with the trafficker. There are other factors, such as drugs and alcohol that may play into the entrapment of both; domestically and internationally trafficked victims.

Additionally, the lifestyle and the amount of money victims can make even though the trafficker takes all their money. It can play a major factor in the victims' lives. Generally, victims who were kidnapped into the trafficking situation are not trapped as long as victims who have been groomed into the life.

When asked participant 5 how long the victims are in their sex trafficking situation, she replied:

I would say at least for 4 and 5 five years. I just had a client she is 47 and is still in the lifestyle. That is a rare exception. The majority stays for about 5 years, and if they have children then that often helps, although some of them end up losing their children, they end up losing custody of their children.

When asked participant 3 about how long victims are in their sex trafficking situation, she stated:

They are all so different. If they are not groomed and were kidnapped then it does not take them that long to get out. There is something in them that reminds them know that there is another life outside of the trafficking situation. But if they were victims of child abuse then it takes them longer to get out, I would say on average they are trapped for 10 years if they were victims of child abuse. If they endured child abuse, they just do not feel like they matter to people and they also think they cannot make the same money outside of that life. While the trafficker takes most of their money, the trafficker may also give them a certain amount of money as allowance. However, I find that many internationally trafficked victims get out of the trafficking sooner. They seem to have more zeal, I guess it is because they are in a bad situation, or they feel trapped and believe they do not have many

options. I find that many of the domestically trafficked clients I attend to at times play the system if they know how to work the system.

When asked participant 9 about how long the victims are generally in the sex trafficking situation, she explained:

The range is very broad depending on different factors. It could be years or months a victim is trapped. You see some victims escape, but it all depends on their situation. If they have a child it makes it harder to get out. The less of a bond there is, the easier it is for them to leave if the opportunity presents itself. When mentioning opportunity, I am referring to talking to a doctor when going to a clinic, or similar.

When asked participant 1 for how long the victims and survivors he worked with were in their sex trafficking situation, he expressed: “The ones that were kidnapped were trapped for a very short time. Several months or less than a month. The ones that were recruited into it due to being seduced by a pimp, they were trapped for years”.

When asked participant 7 about how long the victims and survivors she worked with had been in their situation, she replied:

I have seen survivors escape from their situation of trafficking within 5 months after arrival due to law enforcement intervention. Circumstantial. It depends on law enforcement interference. I would say very rarely I see someone being trapped in that life for more than 3 or 5 years. However, I have seen some victims forced into their situation of trafficking without escape for as long as 10 years. It depends, when they are able to come in contact with either law enforcement or someone who can help them escape their situation of trafficking.

When questioned participant 8 about how long the victims and survivors she worked with had been in their sex trafficking situation, she explained:

I would say most of them were trapped for about 2 years. Some of them get out because they were arrested, then go right back to it after they are released. If they do not go back to it, then this his experience changes their entire life. It becomes part of their identity and who they are; victims or survivors of human trafficking depending on what stage they are at in the healing process.

Two key sub-themes evolved from the theme *Trapped; Trauma and Immigration Status* – when it comes to the latter the subtheme refers to the lack thereof. All 9 participants reported that the victims suffered from trauma which contributed to them getting trapped in the trafficking situation, and 7 out of 9 participants reported that the victims' immigration status in the United States was used against them and they feared deportation, which is why they were trapped in the trafficking situation. It appears, that while both, domestically trafficked victims and internationally trafficked victims suffer from trauma from the experience of getting trafficked and exploited, those victims who are domestically trafficked and have an emotional bond to the traffickers tend to be trapped in the trafficking situation for a longer amount of time than internationally trafficked victims. While many victims often get out of that life by chance due to third party intervention, it is more likely for internationally trafficked victims to get out sooner as they never wanted to be in that situation in the first place. While both, internationally and domestically trafficked victims are defrauded into getting trafficked and exploited , internationally victims do not tend to have an emotional bond to the trafficker which makes it easier for them to leave, escape, or get help when the opportunity presents itself.

Domestically trafficked victims tend to have a harder time when it comes to getting out of the entrapment as they not only have to leave physically, but also have to cut their emotional bond to the trafficker. Many victims also suffer from Stockholm Syndrome, which means they fell in love with their abuser. It is much more difficult to break that emotional bond than just finding a way to remove themselves physically from the situation. Additionally, the victims all suffer from trauma, however, those who were victims of some other type of abuse, such as childhood abuse, or neglect, or sexual abuse, they tend to be in the trafficking situation longer as well, as they were conditioned to endure abuse prior to getting trafficked. To those, abuse had already been part of their lives, therefore, the trafficking situation it is much more of an acceptable situation than for those who had not been victims of abuse as children or young adults.

When questioned participant 4 about how long the victims and survivors she worked with had been in the sex trafficking situation, she replied:

A lot of trauma is involved, and if someone is under constant abuse and they get threaten you every day, they actually believe that something will happen to them. There is also Stockholm syndrome involved. Sometimes, they cannot react differently because of the trauma. You cannot expect the same responses from someone who lived through trauma versus from a normal person. Many of them are not even aware that they are victims of sex trafficking.

When questioned participant 2 about how long the victims and survivors she worked with had been in the sex trafficking situation, she stated: “Some of the victims and survivors I worked with gotten away but I am not sure how. One survivor cannot talk

about her story without having a seizure or severe anxiety. These women really have problems with trauma”.

When questioned participant 5 about how long she believes the average victims and survivors she worked with were trapped in their situation, she shared:

The women I work with were on average trapped between 4 and 5 years. And it is so sad, because their whole persona appears broken. They are completely shattered because they were trafficked with the only thing they have, which is their body. The trauma is so brutal, it breaks them. Simple things that one would assume are easy tasks, such as paying something at a store or going to the doctor, these women feel that they cannot do these simple tasks by themselves. It takes them years to recover. It takes so long for them to start believing in themselves again and for them to not feel disgusted with themselves anymore. They assume this experience is who they are but this is not who they truly are. It takes years for someone like that to recover from this experience and to realize that what they went through only defines who they were, but now who they can become. Once they come to terms with the past, then they can proceed to embrace this new person they always wanted to be when they were young.

When questioned participant 6 about how long the victims and survivors she worked with had been trapped in their situation, she expressed:

Some women were trapped until they were arrested. Long-term; at least one year but between one and 3 years on average. Some of the factors that may have played into how long they were trapped was that the women I work with are all survivors of abuse they endured prior to getting trafficked. I also look at each of

their ACE scores and they rate anywhere from 4-9. ACE scores indicate what type of trauma someone has, and the statistics break it down to the numbers. All the women we serve have high scores, which means that they have been survivors of abuse prior to getting trafficked.

Participant 3 explained that the experience of getting trafficked for the victims she worked with affected them in many ways, and also kept them trapped in their situation for some time. Participant 3 expressed:

The women I worked with became unstable and even holding a job became difficult. They are highly depressed and sometimes they disassociate. These victims have a huge amount of anxiety, so dealing with any stress or even daily problem solving becomes difficult. Everything that happens in daily life becomes emergency and things get blown out of proportion. They start forecasting the worst possible outcome of a situation and they often self-destruct, are hyper vigilant, have anxiety or racing thoughts. It takes a lifetime for them to undo the damage that was done. It is a lifetime commitment to healing and being self-aware.

Participant 8 stated that there are changes that take place within females who have been trafficked and sexually exploited, in particular she explained:

Trauma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), flashbacks, dissociation are results of the experience and almost all my clients have flashbacks then disassociate on command. When their emotions escalate they go into freeze mode or have aggression and become violent. Female victims of sex trafficking

experience a lot of shame, embarrassment, and guilt. All of their friends call them whores, prostitutes, and a million of other names. That alone can break a woman.

When participant 8 was questioned whether the trauma the victims she worked with is part of the reason why the victims are trapped in the trafficking situation, she explained:

The women I worked with all experienced a lack of trust, PTSD, physical impacts that could be from STDs, but also mal nutrition and broken bones from beatings. The mental health piece is there; anxiety, eating disorders, depression, anger, bipolar and schizophrenia which we do not know if these mental disorders were there before or whether they were triggered through the chronic stress these victims endured. Then there are also the social aspects and their lack of ability to bond with others.

While *Trauma* emerged as one of the sub-themes as for why the victims remained trapped in the trafficking situation, their immigration status and the fact that they were not legally authorized to remain and work in the United States also emerged as a sub-theme among the experiences of the practitioners who have worked with internationally trafficked females, or immigrant victims of sex trafficking.

When questioned participant 7 about how long the victims and survivors she worked with had been in the sex trafficking situation, she stated:

I would say very rarely I see someone trapped in the trafficking situation for more than 3 or 5 years. I work with immigrant victims of human trafficking, so the way to control them was by using their immigration status against them.

When questioned participant 4 about how long the victims and survivors she worked with had been in their sex trafficking situation, she stated:

Sometimes they are trapped in the situation for years. Internationally trafficked victims get to the United States, then their passports are withheld and they are trapped and afraid since they are not legally authorized to stay in the United States. Everything is taken from them, all their documents and whatever money they came with. They have nowhere to go and are in a foreign country where they do not know anyone.

Participant 5 reported:

The females I worked with who were trafficked from abroad both thought nobody would believe their story and they were afraid of getting deported. I did not see a difference regarding the length of the trafficking. However, the difference I observed was that international victims tend to be more afraid of using drugs voluntarily than domestically trafficked victims.

Theme 3 - Leaving the Trafficking Situation

Leaving the Trafficking Situation emerged as a major theme throughout the interviews as all 9 participants reported that *Leaving the Trafficking Situation* is very closely related to the victims' resilience and ability to overcome the trafficking experience. *Leaving the Trafficking Situation* is where the process of recovery from the experience begins. While the victims are trapped in their situation, they all think about leaving time before they physically leave. Oftentimes, it takes more than one attempt for them to leave, and on many occasions, it takes for third party intervention to take place for victims of sex trafficking to leave the trafficking situation. Third party intervention

usually takes place in the form of police intervention. Three key subthemes emerged from the theme *Leaving the Trafficking Situation*; Fear, Resources, and *Catalyst Experience* were the sub-themes that surfaced since these were the factors that played into the victims' decisions to leave the trafficking situation. While the fear keeps the victims in their trafficking situation longer, the access to resources and living through catalyst experiences oftentimes helped the victims leave sooner.

Fear

Fear is one of the key sub-themes that emerged during the coding process as all 9 participants reported that the victims have an intense fear of leaving due to several reasons that play into their fear: A lack of trust, a lack of resources, no place to go to, no plan on what they could do to make enough money in any other way, as well as fear of the traffickers hurting their families back home or in their native countries. Oftentimes, victims live in the same neighborhood they were recruited from, and many of them lack a support system, such as their parents or families.

When participant 4 was questioned about how long it takes the female victims and survivors she worked with to leave the trafficking situation, she explained:

The fear delays the process. If they know the trafficker can hurt them and may have inflicted injury, then they think that the traffickers may do this to their families back home or in their native countries, and that fear keeps them in the trafficking situation. Many times they think about leaving, but do not have the courage to leave. The victims are under a lot of pressure, it is very difficult for them to get the courage to leave or reach out for help.

When participant 5 was questioned about the length the majority of the victims and survivors she worked with had been trafficked, she explained:

The victims I worked with all made attempts to leave. It can take years before they finally leave. On average, it takes 3 attempts for them to succeed. Their first attempt usually fails because they are so afraid and so lost, so then they go back to the trafficker.

Participant 8 reported:

The victims absolutely think about leaving way before they physically leave. They think about leaving but cannot just leave. The streets are patrolled and the pimps quickly see a girl if a girl wants to leave. I never encountered anyone who just walked away from it. They all needed a lot of support and help because it was just not possible for them to just walk away from the situation. I had a few girls see people get murdered and that made them even more committed to the pimp because they knew their life was on the line.

Participant 9 expressed:

I know victims think about leaving way before they leave. I hear these stories in which they are able to go to a clinic but then are not able to talk to anyone because the trafficker is with them or because the people were rude because of the clothes they were wearing. Victims have conveyed that they were not able to leave even if the door was wide open, mainly due to a lack of trust.

Participant 7 shared:

Everybody I worked with was thinking about leaving, or they attempted to leave and they were brought back because they were caught. Fear plays a big role. I

mean most of them were defrauded into that life. They had to take time to come up with a plan to leave and wait until they were able to physically leave. One client was forced into taking nude photos and because of her cultural upbringing and concerns she was coerced into staying in the trafficking situation as the traffickers threatened her to send the nude pictures back to her family in the country of her origin.

Participant 6 stated:

I do not know how long it took the survivors I work with to leave and get out of the trafficking situation. I worked with women who are homeless or were arrested and are homeless. Most of the survivors I worked with did not immediately identify as human trafficking victims upon coming to us. What I do know is that there are oftentimes comments made about the good money they used to make and not being able to get a decent job. So that is definitely an obstacle that is in the way of leaving the trafficking situation.

Resources

The sub-theme *Resources* emerged from the theme *Leaving the Trafficking Situation* as all 9 participants' collective experiences revealed that the access to resources or the lack of access to resources are both determining factors for the victims' abilities to leave the trafficking situation. While fear keeps victims trapped in the trafficking situation, the access to resources or the lack of access to resources play vital roles about whether victims, when presented with the opportunity, will reach out for help.

When questioned participant 2 about how the victims she worked with were able to leave the trafficking situation, she stated: "If they did not leave through third party

intervention, such as the Sheriff, then they reached out to non-profit organizations, which helped them leave”.

When asked about whether the victims she worked with left the trafficking situation on their own or whether there was third party intervention that took place, participant 3 expressed:

Sometimes the Sheriff brings them to us. They frequently cooperate with the police and then the police bring them to us. Sometimes they also reach out to us. They are usually tired of their situation, and when a third party provides them with a way out, they take it. Sometimes they are so brain washed, it takes a third party to intervene or find them a way out for them to get out. I think having a support system is very important. All of the victims are extremely codependent. Then after they get out they transfer the codependency onto us. I noticed the ones that have support and financial means it helps them, I would say these are positive contributing factors. Once we lay out to them that we help them with a place to live, a phone, and groceries, they start to feel more empowered and it makes it easier for them to leave.

Participant 5 explained:

Getting in contact with organizations for a way out and get counseling is not easy, but even once they do it, it does not necessarily do the trick. These women have to gain trust first. If they have parents or anyone close to them, then that helps them. If someone provides them with a place to stay then they would more likely leave sooner too. Female sex trafficking victims cannot afford an apartment and do not even know how to hold an apartment. If someone offered them financial support,

then that would help them too. A clean bed and a warm shower would help them tremendously. I would say if someone provides them with housing then that is 80% of the work. Then it also takes patience to walk along their journey with them. But housing and financial assistance would really help them to get out of that life.

Participant 8 shared:

Most of the victims definitely leave due to third party intervention like the FBI or the Sheriff's office. I came across some victims who got out because they went to church. Family support is huge too. Like for example a mother or father who were estranged and may have been on drugs, then sobered up and started to become supportive. That type of support would be mayor help for these girls to get their lives together. Education also plays a huge factor. In fact, that is one of the main wishes they have. These girls feel like education is key to get a good job and they have a lot of catching up to do as far as school and education. As crazy as it sounds, but simple reading and writing skills would help and allow them to journal. A structured environment would help too and getting to know that there is another way of living for them if they want.

Participant 1 reported:

I do not know about how every victim I worked with was able to get out of the trafficking situation, I also work with victims who are addicted to alcohol and drugs, so some were exposed to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), or Narcotics Anonymous (NA), then gotten help through AA or NA and escaped.

Participant 9 expressed:

Connections really help, maybe a repeat customer. Any opportunity that arises through a raid, or access to the health care system. Something happens and there's a need to seek external healthcare like having to go to an emergency room.

Sometimes the information of the Trafficking Hotline is in the bathrooms on rest places, truck stops or convenience stores. If they come across the information of the National Trafficking Hotline, they may call for help.

When questioned participant 7 about how the victims she worked with got out of the trafficking situation, she explained:

If law enforcement was involved, then that would help them leave. Having someone help them leave is usually how they get out. They meet someone at church or the grocery store that one day they are able to go out, and if they find someone who helps them, then they get out. I think the ability to keep going, despite the living situations not always being good, and having to move around a lot, then over time gaining stability is what helps them the most.

Participant 6 expressed:

I think the engagement with faith-based organizations help. The connection with one particular mentor in their lives seems to be the driving force for victims to leave. An opportunity for education, creating their own livelihood, and learning that there are other opportunities for them out there help too.

Participant 4 reported:

Resources are most important. The more awareness about available recourses, the better. These victims can reach out to these resources and that is a way of getting them in touch with a plan to exit that life. Once they reach out they can get

rescued. The police make rescue missions together with organizations. But it depends on the client – if a client is not ready or willing to leave, there is nothing we can do about it. Resources help, at least then they know the help is there and available for them if they wish. To know that their basic needs will be met, such as food, clothing, financial assistance, and housing assistance, that helps them tremendously as they need all the help they can get. Oftentimes they also require immigration and legal referrals. Also, how else would they be able to survive without having a good job if it was not for resources available to them. Our organization also connects the victims with employers.

Catalyst Experience

Catalyst Experience emerged as a sub-theme throughout the interviews, as 7 out of 9 of the subject matter experts reported that a catalyst experience was the reason for female sex trafficking victims they had worked with to decide that they could no longer accept being trapped in the trafficking situation. A catalyst experience tends to be a drug overdose, illness, a near death experience, pregnancy, an arrest, facing jail, getting beaten really badly, or seeing someone else get killed. While pregnancy is not always a factor that makes victims think about whether they want to stay or leave, it can serve as a determining factor for many to decide they do no longer want to live that kind life and want out so their child is not born into that life. Witnessing someone else get killed could go both ways, it may make some victims more loyal to their abuser, fearing that the same thing will happen to them if they try to leave.

When questioned participant 4 about whether there was a determining factor for victims deciding to leave that life, she replied:

Sometimes the victims are not safe. It can be by chance they find a shelter they can stay at but it is hard to determine, most of the time they leave because something happened and they cannot take it anymore. Something severe usually happened and that makes them decide it is time to leave. That is when they reached their limit.

Participant 3 was questioned whether there was anything in particular that was the reason for the victims she worked with to leave when they did. She stated:

It will usually take death or jail for these women to get out. If there are kids and money involved it gets even more complex. These women have to find inner hope. Sometimes, they face criminal charges, then because of it they may go from prostitution to stripping. If they face jailtime it may make them get out for good. The reasons for getting out are personal. I think they get tired of that life, the trafficker may have beaten them so badly that they almost died, or they had a drug overdose and almost died. My clients usually say that they only started to seriously think about leaving once they gotten arrested or survived a drug overdose.

Participant 4 reported:

They often get out because they get arrested, which is a way of getting out. Sometimes something major happens, such as having a child, or getting arrested, or the trafficker gets arrested and they get arrested along with the trafficker. Those are powerful reasons to leave. Once they start living a different life, and once they realize that they can make their own money in the same industry or even outside of that industry, they usually do not go back. However, it usually takes for

something major to happen for them to start thinking about leaving. The grooming is so powerful, it is so hard for these women to see that there is a better life out there for them. It may take years for them to leave but everyone is different. It takes a bit of time for a victim to see it for what it is. Having a child, the death of a parent or of someone in the lifestyle, a drug overdose, or someone around them having a drug overdose also helps them realize that it is time to get out.

Participant 8 expressed:

I do not think it just happens that victims leave. Usually, something happens and that is when they leave. For example an arrest, or an illness. Some of the victims are HIV positive. Sometimes they see other people die, however, for many of them that just makes them more dependent and loyal to the trafficker.

Participant 9 explained:

Most of the time I see that it is something that happened which allowed the victims to leave. It is either law enforcement intervention or they manage to run away and escape. Sometimes, there is an enforcer with a gun and they ran away once before and then got caught and beaten really badly. The death of others within a larger trafficking scheme would usually just make them more loyal to the trafficker. It could go either way. It could also be pregnancy that is the reason for them to decide to leave or something else that binds. It really depends on the girl. Or they tell you I just woke up one day and I realized he did not love me or I had enough.

Participant 7 shared: “Maybe they would see someone else get beaten really bad or someone else escaped and saw that someone else got out and it would empower them to leave too”.

Participant 6 expressed: “I believe it is a bit of both; an arrest often plays a role. The arrest may oftentimes not be directly related to their sex work”.

Theme 4 – Healing from the Trafficking Experience

One key theme that emerged from coding the data, which is particularly important when exploring the resilience of female sex trafficking victims and survivors, is *Healing from the Trafficking Experience*. It appears to be the most profound theme in regard to resilience. Four sub-themes emerged from *Healing from the Trafficking Experience*; *Counseling, Fellowship, Spirituality, and Helping Others*. *Counseling, Fellowship, and Spirituality* help victims in their journey to becoming survivors, and oftentimes in becoming mentors for others who had been trafficked. Helping Others and inspiring other victims and survivors recover from the experience is not a step every survivor can and wants to take, however, it appears to be a key piece in ultimately coming full circle in the recovery process.

Counseling

Counseling has emerged as one of the key sub-themes that helps female victims of sex trafficking recover from their experience. Seven out of 9 participants reported that *Counseling* is one of the first steps that victims should take in their healing process. While some participants reported that some counselors are not prepared to help patients with the heart-breaking stories female sex trafficking victims have, there are counselors who specialize in helping this particular population. Also, non-profit groups usually work

with therapists who are used to work with females who have been trafficked and exploited.

When questioned participant 4 about whether she is aware of any outside help, outside factors, or support that was provided for the victims she worked with, which helped them with developing with the necessary strength or the ability to cope with the experience of getting trafficked and exploited in the commercial sex industry, she replied:

One on one case management, counseling, emotional support, and medical services help. As far as the psychological aspects, they have to learn how to become independent and overcome the fear and the trauma they experienced. A lot of counseling sessions help them with their resilience. When they come to us, a lot of them need their criminal records cleared, and they need help with their immigration documents so they can legally work in the United States.

Participant explained:

They need counseling. I feel that some counselors are not really capable or prepared to help women with such heart-breaking stories, but it does help. If they are able to get back to a regular life, that really helps them. That way they can become independent. This should be done in therapy; they need to go back to the dreams they had prior to being trafficked or before the abuse happened. If they can go back to those dreams, that would really help them. It takes time and the right person to help them.

Participant 8 reported:

Some victims have gang affiliations. They cannot effectively attend groups, some groups I saw them attend were about legislation. It always ends up in a

competition against each other. Individual therapy is key. Therapy makes a world of difference to these girls.

Participant 9 expressed:

One thing that I would say is that service providers are often challenged by the behaviors of these women and girls, sometimes these behaviors are manipulative. Trafficking survivors survived something we cannot even begin to imagine and those behaviors are survivor skills. The providers help them reshape them these skills and use them as life skills so they can become self-sufficient.

Participant 7 shared:

A lot of times the victims are assigned to victim advocates, there are also housing programs, there are social workers we work with who help victims of trafficking, they help them with counseling. That way they can get counseling and then eventually quit being scare of the traffickers. Then they stop being anxious and show their resilience. It is not easy but they do it.

Participant 6 replied: “It is very important for the victims and survivors of this type of abuse to always have a therapist available for them who assists them with one on one counseling”.

Fellowship

Fellowship emerged as a sub-theme as 7 out of 9 participants reported that in order for victims to go through the healing process, they are in need of support systems which can be in the form of support groups. Not every victim and survivor join a support group, however, for some, getting in touch with groups like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) can be a trigger for them to get out of the

trafficking situation or help them stay away from drugs and alcohol. It may provide them the support they so desperately need to go through the healing process and stay committed to their new lifestyle.

When questioned participant 1 about whether he is aware of any outside help, factors, or support that contributed to the victim's necessary strength or the ability to cope with the experience of getting trafficked and exploited in the commercial sex industry, he stated: "There are some support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous that really help the victims cope with the experience".

When participant 2 was questioned about whether she is aware of any outside help, factors, or support that provided the victims she worked with, with the necessary strength or the ability to cope with the experience of being trafficked and exploited in the commercial sex industry, she stated: "One of the survivors I currently work with is going to Narcotics Anonymous, this helps her a tremendously".

Participant 4 reported similar experiences, in particular she stated: "There are some support groups like AA or NA that really help the victims and survivors through the healing process".

Participant 3 shared: "Support groups or case managers help. Many survivors go to churches or church support groups as well, others use Alcoholic Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous".

Participant 8 expressed:

These girls are trained to be in competition with another, so when they attend support groups, they end up competing with each other is the experience I made.

There was one educational group which I noticed worked really well for the girls I

work with called “My Life my Choice”. I found this group to be very helpful because it would educate them and help them. Also family support helps tremendously. It is a whole different ballgame for those who have been trafficked when their parents help them rather than shame them.

Participant 5 reported:

Being surrounded with people who are not in that life style really helps and having a strong support system, and a community that focuses not on what they did, but on who they are really helps them. Support groups help, however, if someone in the community would be there for them to be their sounding board that would be most helpful.

Spirituality

When analyzing the participants responses throughout the interviews, finding *Spirituality* as a way for the victims to either leave the trafficking situation, or help them recover from the experience of getting trafficked was a commonality that 8 out of 9 of the participants expressed. It seems, that spirituality provides the victims and survivors of sex trafficking with a different perspective of the experience by allowing them to form a new narrative about the experience they have lived through. This in return helps them work through the experience, as well as heal from it.

When questioned participant 1 about what he believes the victims and survivors he worked with wished they had in their lives as it would have likely helped them get help and leave that life sooner, he replied: “I would say a connection to a religion or spirituality would provide them with inner guidance and hope. Both, inner guidance and hope really help them leave and recover”.

When questioned participant 2 about whether spirituality would have played a factor about whether a victim considers leaving the trafficking situation, she answered:

I work with addicts. Spirituality would have probably prevented the victims I work with from becoming addicts in the first place. Because they were addicts, they got themselves in these dangerous situations in which they were trafficked. If they would have not have been addicts, they would have not associated with people who grabbed them and trafficked them. For sure spirituality helps them in their recovery, it helps them stay clean and stay out of dangerous situations in which they risk getting re-trafficked.

Participant 4 shared:

Most of the victims and survivors I worked with have their faith. There are some spiritual support groups that help them with the trauma they experienced. Spirituality definitely helps the victims and survivors with coping from the experience and resilience. However, it is still something that can happen to anyone. Some of the victims I worked with would have never thought this could never happen to them.

Participant 5 expressed:

This is a good question. They mostly believe in god and are either catholic or protestant. But they do not practice a religion. I feel like they have their moral beliefs from childhood in the back of their minds which is something that helps them. They have these beliefs in the back of their minds all along, they know it so well. So if they had more of an inner guidance it would help them remember that there is something wrong with the situation they are in. Many of these women

grew up in foster care but they still remember in the back of their minds what is right from wrong. It is just that once they are in that life they feel dirty and taken advantage of so they do not think about these things. They also do not read the bible or go to church. If they get to go to church it usually makes an impact on them and they try to leave the trafficking situation they are in. Spirituality helps them in their recovery, but the trafficking experience still affects them and their lives forever.

Participant 8 reported similar findings:

The broad answer is, yes, spirituality helps them. They would either attend a church one day where they were helped, or their renewed faith in god allows them to start a new life. Spirituality gives them a purpose and changes their perception. Human trafficking victims are for sure the most traumatized clients I have ever worked with. However, I think they had faith when they were younger, then through what happened to them, they completely lost their faith. A lot of them are seeking inner guidance and find spirituality in their recovery process. It is hard to pinpoint what it is that helps them in their recovery. We know spirituality is very helpful but we need to convince them that it helps them. When they found spirituality, they have something to fall back on when things get rough. It is just that it takes a lot until they find that inner guidance. It is part of their healing process to even find spirituality.

Participant 6 replied:

Absolutely, spirituality helps. I think the engagement with faith-based organizations helps. These females often do not believe in the spiritual piece, but

if they find that, then they are not totally powerless and have a basis of hope. I think that is where the spiritual piece of meditation and prayers becomes very helpful. While their experience becomes part of who they are, it also becomes part of the choices they make in the future. Spirituality helps them with the inner guidance the need. It helps them refine who they want to be.

Participant 9 stated:

We found that with survivors from Mexico spirituality has played a big factor. But every survivor is different. Spirituality, religion, and community support - it does not work the same way for everyone. What may do the trick with Alcoholics Anonymous for some survivors, for others faith-based organizations will do it. It depends also on the vulnerabilities of the survivors. I have seen so many diverse backgrounds of survivors and we are all humans and all have different vulnerabilities. I would not be able to tell what their connection to spirituality was prior to getting trafficked, but I know that after the trafficking they like to connect with churches and spirituality. It might be a part of their healing process. It is just so different for everyone. We have seen victims and survivors from poor and rich backgrounds so the diversity is so broad and we cannot say one approach fits all.

Helping Others

Helping Others emerged as a key sub-theme since it revealed to be one of the ultimate pieces to lead to a survivor's full recovery. Eight out of 9 subject matter experts reported that they witnessed that those survivors who make a full recovery all started to help other victims of human trafficking in their recovery process. Oftentimes, those survivors who help other victims and survivors in their recovery process create their own

non-profit organizations and devote their lives to helping others. The collective experiences of the participants revealed that 6 out of 9 participants reported that *Inspiring other Victims and Survivors* helps survivors in their own healing process. It occurs when female victims of sex trafficking healed to a great degree, and then become mentors for other victims. It models the victims that it is indeed possible to change their lives and they inspire those who are considering to leave, or have already left the trafficking situation to follow in their footsteps by showing them that it can be done. While in the younger victim populations there are some concerns about the girls competing with each other, the older victims and survivor populations tend to really benefit from having survivor mentors who are further along in their healing process.

When questioned participant 1 about whether he is aware of anything that would contribute to the victims' resilience and ability to bounce back from the experience of getting trafficked and sexually exploited, he replied:

Helping other victims helps them and gives them a purpose. Look at me I did the same thing. I was an addict then sobered up and became a social worker. Now I am helping addicts in their recovery process. I have been clean for over 30 years. It definitely helps the survivors' resilience when they are provided with the opportunity to mentor and help other victims and survivors.

Participant 3 shared similar observations she made when working with the victim population:

I observed that if they devote themselves to helping others in something they have been traumatized themselves, then it helps them in their own healing process. I know that sounds crazy but that really seems to help them. When they see how

much of a difference they make and what they do helps others it really helps them in their own healing. One cannot comprehend what was told to them in order for them to lie down for the johns. When helping others, all that inner guilt and hate is replaced with compassion, love, and self-achievement. One girl graduated high school within 2 years while being trafficked and groomed by her mother and gradually exposed to the lifestyle. She had some type of dissociative disorder since her whole life consisted of abuse. I think that the trafficking experience is so bad that they need something so much greater to replace it with. Like as bad as the experience was, they can do something much bigger with it. Since the trauma is also so layered they have to kind of live to help someone else to truly get over what they lived through themselves. The few people who I have seen who have come out and articulated what they feel on the inside are those who are living to help others. All of them are leaders who teach and train us on how to work with the victim populations, form organizations and so on. It takes a lot of resilience to get to this point but I know all of our victims have this kind of resilience within them. They survived and they recovered and is our job to bring this type of resilience out of them so they can help others and help themselves in the process. I think it is exactly what helps them make sense of all that they lived through. It completes their inner search for meaning and purpose in life.

Participant 4 explained:

It depends on the vulnerability of the person. However, if they end up helping other victims, it gives them a purpose and it helps in their own recovery process. Once they reached the stage of having been through everything and came out the

other side, once they are ready, helping other victim helps them with coping and brings out how resilient they really are.

Participant 5 replied:

Once they are able to help other people, that really helps them get over their own experience. Once victims see someone else who was as broken as they are change their life and live a good life, that helps them get inspired to do the same. It helps the survivors who mentor victims in their own healing process too. If a survivor can mirror for them what they can do with their lives without telling them what to do that really helps. The victims have to do it themselves, nobody can do it for them. It also depends on the personality of the victims and survivors. But for the most part it is them who have to figure out for themselves what they want to do with their lives, and they do get inspired seeing other survivors who lived through the same and are now living a different life.

Participant 8 replied:

Once a survivor is ready to inspire other victims it is very helpful. A mentorship is helpful but sometimes if a girl had a history of recruiting then it can get worrisome. I have put together a process in our organization in which survivors have to go through therapy first, before they can become a mentor for others. Helping others and advocating is a really good thing but in order to do so and be capable to do so, they have to help themselves first.

Participant 7 expressed:

I most commonly see that survivors of trafficking are very resilient. When they first escape their situation of trafficking they are very anxious as a result of the

trauma. But as they report their traffickers and begin recovery you see them feel empowered and healed by time. Another thing that can really empower them is gaining legal status because it provides them with stability. I know of some survivors of labor trafficking who have spoken out about their experience but I did not hear or know of that many sex trafficking survivors who have spoken out. They cannot really talk much about it until they receive their legal immigration status in the United States. But there are survivors which have become empowered and they want to speak out to prevent this from happening to others. It is one of the most empowering things for some of the survivors to do, to help others not to fall into the same situation they were in.

Participant 6 shared: “What helps them is helping others by telling their story and mentoring other victims and survivors who are not that far along in their healing”.

Participant 9 expressed:

Survivor mentors are great. Helping others is a way for a survivors to give back. And it gives them purpose. It is an effective way to connect with survivors too because oftentimes they feel that unless one lived through the same experience they cannot understand.

Theme 5 – Substance Abuse

Substance Abuse is a key theme that surfaced during the data analysis as all 9 subject matter experts reported that substance abuse and sex trafficking go hand in hand. While it is a key theme, at the same time it is also a theme that stands apart by itself, as it can be an initial vulnerability of the victims that makes them more likely targets for traffickers, or it can become a vulnerability later on during the trafficking. Drugs and

alcohol are frequently used as a method of control by traffickers and pimps. Drug addiction also makes it harder for trafficking victims to leave the trafficking situation. However, drug addiction does not always play a role in every trafficking case. The participants reported that substance abuse mostly plays a role in domestically trafficked females, as it is either a way to lure them in, or a method to control them. The subject matter experts reported that internationally trafficked females are more hesitant to try drugs, and drug addiction is usually not how internationally trafficked victims get lured in or why they get trafficked into the United States. Two key sub-themes emerged within the theme *Substance Abuse; Drugs and Alcohol* and *Relapse and Falling Back into that Life*.

Drugs and Alcohol

Drugs and Alcohol emerged as a sub-theme within *Substance Abuse*, as 8 out of 9 subject matter experts reported that drug abuse oftentimes plays a role in why human trafficking victims get trafficked. The subject matter expert's statements clearly showed that it is a way for traffickers to control their victims once they are trapped in the trafficking situation. However, traffickers tend to more likely to control their victims with drugs and alcohol in cases of domestic trafficking, as females who are trafficked into the United States can easily be controlled by using their immigration status against them, and threatening them with deportation.

When questioned participant 1 about whether substance abuse played a role in why the females he worked with were trafficked he replied:

I work mainly with addicts, so all the females sex trafficking victims I worked with are either addicted to drugs or alcohol, or both. One female I currently work

with was kidnapped and then trafficked. The other female I currently work with was seduced by a pimp. She is an addict as well. I would say in most of the women I worked with over the course of the years, drugs and alcohol played a role.

Participant 2 who works with addicts as well, explained:

The women and have worked with were all kidnapped into trafficking or recruited in order to get drugs and alcohol. I would say probably their drug dealer or a drug dealer was the trafficker. They were kidnapped, drugged, and then sold over and over. I do not think they do even know how many customers they had to serve during the time they were trafficked because they were drugged. Drugs was the reason why they were trafficked in the first place. If they had sobriety that would have helped and prevented them from getting trafficked. These girls really need a gentle reintegration into life and an understanding that perhaps they did not need the drugs which kept them in the trafficking situation. This could happen to anyone really, but it is much more likely to happen to someone who abuses drugs and alcohol. It is even worse with addicts, as the problem of addiction is generally an isolating disease.

Participant 4 shared:

Substance abuse can play a role but drugs are usually introduced after they get here. It could be both ways, the trafficker will know what he is aiming for. Drugs make it easier to manipulate the person. Sometimes they are introduced to drugs after they were trafficked then they develop an addiction. It is a way for traffickers control their victims. Once they are addicted to a drug, they are also

having a harder time getting out of that life because then they will go into withdrawal. Also, sometimes they are on drugs and it takes them 10 years to even realized that they are sex trafficking victims. They think they are performing these services in order to get the drugs.

Participant 3 works with females who are trafficking victims and at the same time have substance abuse problems, she expressed:

Most of the women I worked with do drugs and during the recruitment process, the traffickers did drugs with them. Some who do not do drugs have kids, but the majority does drugs. Drugs and human trafficking go hand in hand. The victims may be looking for drugs or for a way to get the drugs for free and that is how they end up getting trafficked. Some of them had issues with drugs before they were trafficked, and some were introduced to drugs after they were trafficked. It is usually drugs, then the sex industry, then there they met the trafficker. Or it is drugs, then they get trafficked, and then they end up in the commercial sex industry. Most of them worked in the commercial sex industry already and then get trafficked. As long as they stay sober they are not vulnerable to getting trafficked. But they usually either use drugs to work in the sex industry or they work in the sex industry to get the money to get the drugs. One ties with the other. As long as they stay sober, they do not feel like they belong in this world again to make money for drugs or need drugs for numbing down.

Participant 5 explained:

For some of the women I worked with, substance abuse played a role. Most of them started using drugs after they were trafficking or during the time they were

trafficked. For the ones who had issues with drugs and alcohol before they were trafficked, then that was the reason why they ended up getting trafficked. If they are addicted to drugs it is a lot harder for them to leave the trafficking situation. If they are not into drugs and alcohol it is easier for them to leave that life. I noticed that victims who were trafficked into the United States are more afraid of using drugs than domestically trafficked victims.

Participant 8 mainly works with females who are underage and had been incarcerated, she shared:

I would you say drug addiction plays a factor in their situation. It is an easy way to lure kids in. On the other side of it a lot of traffickers were drugging their victims in order to prevent them from standing trial. Many never tried drugs prior to getting trafficked, then the trafficker introduced them to drugs because it is easier for them to control their victims when they are on drugs. We also have girls who were recruited from substance abuse centers. The traffickers go recruit specifically from there. For example, when girls get ordered to go through substance abuse programs by the court because they were arrested, then they end up getting trafficked from the center. They would say that a friend comes to pick them up when in fact the pimp would pick them up. Once they get picked up by the pimp they are gone.

Participant 9 replied:

Substance abuse is used as part of the recruitment process or it can also be used as a factor of control. With internationally trafficked victims it seems to be more likely the case that if they were internationally trafficked it is a way to control

them after they were recruited and while they are in the trafficking situation.

Domestically trafficked victims were oftentimes drug abusers prior to getting trafficked.

Participant 7 works with immigrant victims of trafficking and she expressed that for victims who were trafficked into the country, substance abuse usually did not play a role prior to the trafficking. In particular, she explained:

In my experience, drug use came into play after they were recruited. A trafficker would use drugs to control someone. However, I deal with women and girls who were trafficked into the United States, so drug abuse was not the controlling factor for most of them because all the traffickers needed to do was use their immigration status against them.

Participant 6 stated:

Substance abuse oftentimes becomes part of a factor, but was not necessarily a factor up front. However, all the women I worked with have substance abuse issues. I would say it plays a major factor for them to get out of the addiction.

Relapse and Falling back into that Life

Relapse and Falling back into that Life emerged as a sub-theme, as 5 out of 9 subject expert matters who were interviewed for this research study reported that when victims and survivors are addicted to drugs and alcohol and they relapse, they frequently go back to either a pimp or to working in the commercial sex industry to make money to get drugs. While most domestically trafficked females tend to have issues with substance abuse, those females who were trafficked into the United States from a foreign country tend have to not have had problems with substance abuse prior to the trafficking. Drugs

may be introduced after an immigrant victim of sex trafficking was trafficked into the United States. It is also the reason why those females who were trafficked into the United States tend to be more hesitant about trying drugs, and tend to have less substance abuse issues and with that a lesser risk of relapsing after they leave the trafficking situation. The practitioners who reported that drug and alcohol abuse was a determining factor for getting trafficked with the population they work with also reported that relapsing after a period of sobriety is the determining factor for those females to go back to either the trafficking situation or to working in the sex trade to make the money to get drugs and alcohol.

When participant 1 was asked if any of the victims he encountered are tempted to go back into that that life, he replied:

Some are out of that life for a few years then when they relapse they go back to it. One I currently work with goes back to it when she relapses, the other female I currently work with never looks back and but she also does not relapse.

Participant 2 expressed:

The victims I work with are mostly drug and alcohol addicts. They were trafficked because they are addicts. I know of some that fall back into drugs and alcohol, but of no one who would want to go back to getting trafficked. However, when they relapse they go back to putting themselves into dangerous situations in which they risk getting trafficked again.

Participant 3 commented:

I think most of the victims I worked with are tempted by the drugs and the money they used to make. One victim said she used to make around \$15,000 per month,

sometimes even more although the trafficker took all of the money she made. She did not even do the expensive services, yet made that kind of money.

Participant 4 shared:

Many of the women I know go back. I feel like it is not even the money it is their vulnerabilities that make them go back. These women are so broken and it is very hard for them to exit that life and start over, trying to become who they wanted to become when they were younger. They embrace this fake person they have become and start believing in it. At some point many go back and it is so sad to witness. They usually make multiple attempts to leave and keep falling back into that life, oftentimes drugs and alcohol play a role in why they go back.

When asked participant 6 whether victims and survivors she worked with were ever tempted to go back to the life or the trafficking situation she shared:

Some of these women go back, yes, that happens sometimes. I am not sure why exactly but I hear it is because they are still addicted to drugs and they still want to be able to make the kind of money they used to make in the sex industry.

Participant 7, who works with immigrant victims of trafficking expressed:

I have never seen anyone of the victims I work with wanting to go back to prostitution. I have never seen that happen, although I saw one client who wanted to go back to exotic dancing but not to prostitution.

Participant 9 explained that those among the victim populations she encountered may fall back into trafficking due to a combination of the need and not knowing what to do next. In particular she explained:

Some of the factors that makes victims go back is the money they used to make and that they do not have to give that money to anyone else anymore. They can keep it for themselves. The money may be the drive that would make someone want to go back to that life. Substance abuse can play a factor in going back too. If they get re-trafficked it is frequently because they met another guy who ended up exploiting them. Then it could be years or long periods of time they are in the trafficking situation again.

Participant 8 reported that the girls she works with are all tempted to go back to the trafficking situation. More specifically, she explained:

Every survivor I encountered is tempted to go back. It is usually both; the trafficker and the life. They want to make the money and live that kind of life. It is an emotional bond to the trafficker but also the lifestyle that makes them want to go back. Substance abuse definitely plays a role too.

Summary

The findings satisfied the primary goal of this research study and answered the research questions through the 5 emergent themes and 19 sub-themes that developed throughout the data analysis process, while providing a deeper understanding of the shared experience of the subject matter experts. The individual experiences of the participants indicated very strong similarities, and evidenced shared perspectives which represent the essence of the phenomenon researched (Moustakas, 1994).

This study suggests that the factors that keep victims of human trafficking in their trafficking situation are the trauma they are suffering from, an emotional bond they may share with the trafficker, their immigration status in the United States, and the fear of

getting deported, as well as drug abuse. Domestically trafficked victims tend to share an emotional bond with the trafficker and frequently refer to the trafficker or pimp as their boyfriend even long after leaving the trafficking situation. However, internationally trafficked victims, or immigrant victims of human trafficking tend to not share an emotional bond with the trafficker and the main factor that keeps them in the trafficking situation is their fear of getting deported from the United States due to their immigration status. Substance abuse may play a role in the why and for how long victims are trapped in the trafficking situation.

The factors that enable female victims of sex trafficking to break free from the trafficking situations are oftentimes the experience of a catalyst events, which is an experience in the form of facing life or death, illness, pregnancy, or facing a prison sentence. A catalyst experience is considered a trigger experience. These type of experiences lead female victims of sex trafficking to evaluate their situation, and overcome the fear they experience that so far has kept them from leaving the trafficking situation. The access to resources was reported as a critical factor that determines whether victims leave the trafficking situation.

The factors that revealed whether female victims of sex trafficking make a full recovery are the access to counseling, having a support system, finding spirituality, and helping others, as well as staying away from drugs and alcohol. One on one counseling with a therapist who is well equipped to work with this population was reported to be one of the first major steps in the healing process. Joining fellowships and support groups also revealed to be very helpful in the recovery process of the survivors, as these not only provides the survivors with support, but also with the ability to make new friends, and

surround themselves with a different environment of people who share similar experiences, challenges, and goals. Seeking to find spirituality was reported to be very beneficial in the healing process of female survivors of sex trafficking because it provides the survivors with the ability to form a new narrative about their experiences, and with a new outlook and an inner guidance that they were previously missing, they have something to fall back onto should they experience difficult situations in the future. Finding spirituality fulfills the inner search for meaning and connection. It also allows for the survivors to find a meaning in their experience which they can use for the benefit of society and to help other victims. Helping other victims of human trafficking was reported to be the key to making a full recovery. Devoting their lives to helping other victims and inspiring other victims to change their lives was reported to be what ultimately helps with a survivor's full recovery from the trafficking situation. By seeing what a difference they can make in other victims, helping others and inspiring other victims and survivors was reported to be a trigger for their own resilience.

This chapter also presented the individual conflict the subject matter experts experience when they help female victims of sex trafficking recover from their experience. While some subject matter experts expressed the experience of similar conflicts, they also indicated that not all of them shared the same conflict and challenges when working with this population. This chapter highlights the subject matter expert's individual perceptions of the conflict they encountered. The findings indicate that there is no "one fits all" approach when it comes to working with female sex trafficking victims and survivors.

Chapter 5 includes the summary of the data analysis and discusses the 5 emergent themes while connecting the themes back to the already existing literature in the field. Further, chapter 5 includes the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, the implications of the study, an individual conflict resolution methodology, the contributions to the field of conflict analysis and resolution, the personal reflection of the researcher, and the conclusion of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The aim of this study was to shed light onto the conflict the subject matter experts who work with the female sex trafficking victim populations face when they help these women and girls recover from the traumatic experience of getting trafficked. In particular, this study aimed to explore the factors that contribute to the resilience in female sex trafficking victims. By shedding light onto the individual conflict the practitioners face when working with this population, the researcher recommends the implementation of conflict management strategies when dealing with the victim populations. This may have a positive impact on the subject matter experts' relationships to the individual victims and survivors they work with and reduce the challenges they face, as well as mitigate any conflicts they experience when working with this population. In addition, this study filled a gap in the existing literature by exploring the factors that contribute to the female sex trafficking victims' resilience. The analysis of the data that was collected through the semi-structured interviews with the subject matter experts was facilitated using NVivo 12 Plus software. Before the researcher conducted the interviews with the subject matter experts, as well as before and during the data analysis, she performed bracketing as a way to mitigate her own preconceptions.

The findings of this study answered the following research questions:

- What are the factors that keep victims of human traffickers in their trafficking situation before they break free from their trafficker?
- What are the factors that enable victims of sex trafficking to break free from the trafficking situation?

- Was there a trigger experience for victims of sex trafficking that made them decide to break free from their trafficker? If so, of what nature?
- What are the factors that contribute to female sex trafficking survivor's healing from the experience of getting trafficked?

The researcher transcribed the phone interviews into Microsoft Word, and then imported the Microsoft Word documents into NVivo 12 Plus software, where she edited the data with the thematic coding feature. The researcher also used other features of the NVivo 12P Plus software, such as the mind mapping feature, node creation, as well as charts and reports. Preliminary themes from the data were used in the thematic coding process. The researcher performed descriptive coding of the 9 semi-structured interviews based on the key themes that emerged after the completion of every interview and throughout the data analysis. During the coding process, the themes were refined and combined, and the sub-themes were created based on what the thematic analysis of the transcripts revealed.

After completing the initial bracketing process, the researcher horizontalized and combined the data. With in-depth knowledge about the data in mind and with data overlapping itself, 5 themes surfaced, which were coded in NVivo 12 Plus software through nodes. The researcher coded larger blocks of data according to the 5 themes that emerged, and at that point she created individual text descriptions for the context that was coded according to the 5 emerging themes. Imaginative variation was used to create individual structural descriptions. The data was analyzed for patterns and trends among the 5 key themes. During this process 19 sub-themes emerged. The 19 sub-themes were coded according to the patterns that surfaced during the data analysis and coded

accordingly. For the most meaningful representation of the findings, the researcher chose the most compelling example representatives of the 5 themes.

In addition, a textual description was added to the individual conflicts the practitioners experienced while helping female sex trafficking victims recover from their trafficking experience. The textual description represents the type of conflicts these subject matter experts experienced. Further, composite textual and structural descriptions were integrated to arrange the essence of the phenomenon that the 9 subject matter experts experienced and discussed during their interviews with the researcher. As a final step, all activities performed in NVivo 12 Plus software were recorded in a project event log. The project event log was then exported to Microsoft Excel for recording purposes.

The findings of this study shed insight into the lived experiences of the subject matter experts, including their thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and the meanings of thereof. The following 5 main themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data:

- Recruitment
- Exploitation
- Leaving the Trafficking Situation
- Recovering from the Trafficking Situation
- Substance Abuse

The research questions posed in this study were answered through these 5 themes, including their 19 sub-themes, which provided a deeper understanding of the subject matter experts shared lived experiences helping female sex trafficking victims recover from their experience of having been trafficked and sexually exploited. This chapter discusses the findings of this study, as well as how these findings are linked to the

existing literature. This chapter also indicates the limitations of this study, recommendations for practice and future research, as well as contributions to the field of conflict analysis and resolution. Additionally, this chapter includes the personal reflection of the researcher and summarizes the findings of the study. While the findings of this study demonstrate a deeper understanding of the collectively perceived individual conflicts the practitioners face when working with the female victim population, this study also identifies the measures taken by the practitioners that help the victims and survivors overcome the traumatic experience of trafficking, and bring out the victims' resilience within them.

Discussion of the Findings

The lived experiences of the subject matter experts indicate that all of them experienced conflict when helping female victims of sex trafficking recover from the trafficking experience. In particular, the conflicts that the practitioners experience and have experienced are a lack of trust that is generated through the trafficking experience itself, as well as the trauma most victims already experienced through early childhood experiences, such as experiences of abuse or neglect. These females were already vulnerable before they were trafficked, and the trafficking occurred because they trusted the wrong people.

A second reason for the conflict the subject matter experts experience are the substance abuse issues of the females they work with. Guiding the victims and survivors towards maintaining abstinence from drugs and alcohol and prevent relapses that make them go back to dangerous situations can be a very challenging task that requires a lot of empathy and patience from those who try to help them. Preventing victims from going

back to work in the commercial sex industry so they can still make that money, or to earn money to buy drugs is also one of the main conflicts that were revealed by the subject matter experts.

Another reason for conflict experienced by the subject matter experts is amount of time it takes for victims to recover, including the time it takes for them to get work authorizations, visas, or their criminal records cleared. During these times, the victims may not be able to work in the United States if they are immigrant victims of human trafficking. The time it takes until they get their work authorizations or their visas can be lengthy and may take up to 2 years. Also, criminal records may prevent victims of trafficking from gaining meaningful employment. These processes take time. T-visas take up to 2 years to be granted, and the clearing of a criminal record can be a lengthy process as well. The conflicts the subject matter experts experience due to the circumstances discussed above are not conflicts that practitioners can influence as these processes are processes that involve local government agencies and the federal government. The time it takes for this process depends on the agency responsible for the task. However, the 5 key themes that emerged throughout the data analysis and their conclusions are discussed as follows.

Theme 1 - Recruitment

The first theme that emerged from the data that was collected from the participant interviews was the theme *Recruitment*. *Recruitment* is a theme that all 9 participants reported on. The sub-themes that emerged from *Recruitment* are: *Age at the Time of Entry and Exit into the Trafficking*, *Deception*, *Vulnerabilities*, and there are 2 key sub-

themes *that emerged from Vulnerabilities; Romantic Relationship, and the Hope for a better Life in the United States.*

Consistent with the existing literature, the findings of this study suggest that most female sex trafficking victims are very young at the time they get recruited into trafficking. Koltra (2010), suggests that the majority of sex trafficking victims are minors at the time they are recruited into working in the commercial sex industry. All 9 participants reported that the victims they worked with were either in their early twenties, or they were minors at the time recruitment took place. One participant, participant 8 works with females who are minors or were minors at the time they were recruited into trafficking. The average age of the victims she works with is consistent with the already existing literature on sex trafficking of minors, in which the Department of Justice (2004), reported that the average age for minor female sex trafficking victims is somewhere between 12 and 14 years of age. Further, participant 2 reported victims she worked with having been kidnapped into trafficking, which does not appear to be the norm. However, existing literature suggests that kidnapping may happen when a victim refuses to go with the trafficker (Hodge, DR., 2008).

Consistent with the already existing literature, the findings of this study also suggest that the average age the victims when recruited into sex trafficking is in their early twenties or when they are still underage. These findings are consistent with the report of the Polaris Project (2020), which indicate that the average age of sex trafficking victims in 2019 is 17 years of age.

Also, as already indicated in the existing literature, the findings of this study show how the recruitment process of female sex trafficking victims always consists of

deceptive practices for the purpose of exploitation (U.S. Department of State, 2019). A pimp knows exactly what strings to pull, and how to manipulate the victims to lure them in (Fine & Collins, 2011).

Eight out of 9 participants reported that deception was used to lure in the victims they encountered in their line of work, regardless of whether the victims were trafficked domestically or internationally. The only distinction that was made by the majority of the participants was that internationally trafficked victims tend to be recruited with the promise of good employment in the United States, while domestically trafficked victims tend to fall in love with a pimp who masquerades as their boyfriend, then forces them into prostitution. These findings are consistent with the existing literature in the field, which suggests that sex trafficking victims who are trafficked into the United States are usually recruited by tricking them into believing there will be a modeling career that awaits them in the United States, a well-paying job, study abroad, or affordable vacation opportunities. However, when the victims arrive in the United States, their reality looks very different from the false promises of the recruiters. The victims' documents are taken from them and they are subject to sexual exploitation by the traffickers (Siskin & Sun Wyler, 2013). All participants except participant 7, reported that domestically trafficked victims are usually lured in with the believe that they found love, as the trafficker frequently plays a Romeo-type persona to recruit them. Participant 7, who works as an attorney for a non-profit group in South Florida caters to immigrant victims of human trafficking. In particular, she helps them get legal status in the United States and a work permit. She reported that the majority of the women she works with were trafficked with the promise of good employment in the United States. These findings are in line with the

existing literature about how the majority of domestically trafficked victims are lured in, versus the majority of the victims who are domestically trafficked. Domestically trafficked victims oftentimes fall in love with the perpetrator before they are sold into the commercial sex industry (Fine & Collins, 2011). Internationally trafficked victims are usually defrauded into the situation, with the promise of employment in the United States.

Theme 2 - Exploitation

The second theme that emerged from the data that was collected is *Exploitation*. When analyzing the data, two sub-themes surfaced; *Sexual Exploitation*, and *Trapped*. All participants, with an exception of participants 1 and 2 reported that the victims they worked with were essentially recruited to work in the commercial sex industry. Practitioner 2 reported of the victims she works with getting kidnapped due to their drug addictions, and because they put themselves in dangerous situations when they obtain drugs. Also practitioner 1 reported of some kidnappings, but also of recruitment into trafficking. Practitioner 7 reported that some of the women she worked with knew they were expected to work as exotic dancers, but were not aware of the full extent of what would be expected from them upon arrival in the United States. However, all domestically trafficked victims have no idea about the traffickers hidden agendas. All 9 subject matter experts reported that the traffickers and pimps always use deceptive strategies to recruit their victims. The only exceptions to that are when traffickers kidnap their victims into trafficking, which accounts for a small percentage of sex trafficking victims. Once the victims are recruited, they are forced to work at strip clubs, or the trafficker sets up dates for the night with the johns, which take place at residences or

hotels. The subject matter experts also reported that over the past years there has been a trend for online advertisement, such as social media platforms and pages like “Backpage” prior to the page getting shut down.

According to Koltra (2010), the market for traffickers is lucrative due to the demand that exists in the commercial sex industry. In the United States, a culture of tolerance exists, in which pimping, stripping, and going to the strip club is modeled as a glamorized lifestyle. If there would not be such a demand, pimps and traffickers would be out of business. Pimps control markets, such as sex parlors, escort and massage services, conventions, and prostitution at tourist venues.

As the findings of this study suggest, the victims are always exploited in the commercial sex industry, which is consistent with the existing literature on sex trafficking.

The victims are also always trapped in the trafficking situation, which may last between months and years, which is how the sub-theme *Trapped* emerged from the data that was collected from the subject matter experts. Two sub-themes, *Trauma* and *Immigration Status in the United States* surfaced from the theme *Trapped*. All practitioners reported that the victims they worked with were trapped and had to figure out how to get themselves out of the trafficking situation. While all victims are trapped in the trafficking situation, there is a distinction between domestically trafficked victims and internationally trafficked victims, as domestically trafficked victims tend to be trapped due to the emotional bond they share with the trafficker, among other reasons. However, the emotional bond develops prior to the onset of the exploitation in the recruitment phase in which the victims fall for the trafficker’s recruitment strategies in which he plays

their boyfriend who takes care of them. Internationally trafficked victims tend to get recruited through employment offers, therefore it is not the norm for them to form an emotional bond with the trafficker. This does not conclude that it cannot happen, just that the tendency with females who are trafficked into the United States is that they were promised good employment, then once they arrive in the United States, their documents are taken from them, and they find themselves in a country in which they do not know how the system works and they do not speak the language. They first have to come up with a plan on how to get out of the trafficking situation. The data collected from this study is consistent with the existing literature on sex trafficking, as Hughes (2001), reported:

For the most part, traffickers who traffic their victims internationally lure their victims in with the promise of a job and a better life in the United States. Once the victims arrive at their destination, their travel documents are taken from them, and they are told that they have to work off the cost incurred by the traffickers to get them to the United States. This is considered “debt-bondage”. In these cases, the traffickers use the monetary need of a victim, and their hope for a better-quality life in order to gain their trust and consent to travel to their destination country, where they get exploited by the trafficker. Many women who get trafficked from the former Soviet Union respond to ads in which jobs as nannies, waitresses, hostesses, and dancers are advertised. The vulnerabilities of the women who respond to these ads are usually that they try to escape political and social insecurity, or poverty (p.12).

As reported by the subject matter experts, domestically trafficked victims face a very difficult challenge when trying to leave the trafficking situation due to the emotional bond they tend to share with the trafficker or pimp. These findings are consistent with the existing literature on human trafficking. Existing literature on human trafficking also suggests that Stockholm Syndrome and trauma bonding are psychological factors that occur in human trafficking victims which pose a great challenge the victims have to overcome when leaving the trafficker. Trauma bonding occurs when victims of human trafficking and the traffickers develop a co-dependent relationship, which takes on the form of a pseudo familiar relationship (Polaris, 2019). Stockholm Syndrome describes the “bond” that frequently develops between hostages and their captors, in which the hostages hold no grudge against their captors. It has been suggested that this bond occurs due to the high stress situation hostages goes through when they are captured and held hostage. Some psychologists, such as Sigmund Freud (1923), suggest that due to the stress victims are living through, the ego must react in ways to eliminate the captor as a threat, and by taking on the captor’s point of view, this process of elimination can be achieved (Mc Kenzie, 1987).

Theme 3 - Leaving the Trafficking Situation

The third theme that surfaced throughout the data analysis was *Leaving the Trafficking Situation*. This theme arose during the data analysis from the data that was collected from the subject matter experts. Three sub-themes emerged from *Leaving the Trafficking situation: Catalyst Experience, Fear, and Resources*. Existing literature had discussed for decades how traffickers instill fear within their victims, and the findings of this study confirmed such to be true. Internationally trafficked victims frequently fear the

traffickers could hurt their families in their native countries, in addition to fearing deportation from the United States. Existing literature suggests that the fear of prosecution by law enforcement for crossing the border illegally and the fear of deportation to their native countries tend to keep victims who were trafficked into the United States trapped in the trafficking situation (Tomkinson, 2012). Additionally, they are not familiar with the United States, and they oftentimes experience language barriers. Domestically trafficked victims on the other hand do not have to fear deportation unless they are migrants who had come to the United States illegally prior to getting trafficked. Existing literature points to migrants being at a higher risk of getting trafficked as stated by Tompkinson (2012). Domestically trafficked victims who are immigrant victims of sex trafficking in legal immigration status, or U.S. citizen victims have other reasons that keep them in the trafficking situation than fear of deportation. Instead, they are scared for their lives and sometimes the lives of their families in the United States. Oftentimes, these women and girls live in the same neighborhoods they were trafficked from, or they were runaways, who have no place to go to, or such they believe. The existing literature states that victims usually fear that if they would reveal the trafficking situation they are in, then they would suffer the consequences, such as physical violence inflicted by the trafficker or pimp. However, this researcher concludes that fear, regardless of the reason for the fear, is one of the main factors that keeps female victims of sex trafficking from leaving the trafficking situation.

While the victims are always fearful while they are in the trafficking situation, sometimes they experience a catalyst experience that makes them reevaluate their situation and overcome their fear. A catalyst experience is considered a life changing

experience. Five of the subject matter experts reported that such an experience is usually near death, an arrest, facing a prison sentence, pregnancy, or a drug overdose. This type of experience triggers strength and courage within the victims and allows them to overcome their fear of leaving the trafficking situation they are in. It is an experience that either pushes these women and girls over the edge, or they just suddenly come to the realization that the pimp does not love them, or they suddenly do not want to accept the situation they are in any longer. This is when they reached their limit and the desire to live a different life becomes stronger than the forces that keep them in the trafficking situation. A catalyst experience may also be in the form of an illness, such as being HIV positive, or witnessing the death of someone close to them. These findings are the norm for domestically trafficked victims, which are consistent with some of the limited existing literature on resiliency in trafficking victims as reported by Cecchet & Thoburn (2014). In their 2014 study, Cecchet & Thoburn reported the experiences of the women participants, and how their resilience to survive the sex industry were the experience of catalyst events. However, in Cecchet & Thoburn's study, only 6 participants were representing the women survivors of sex trafficking, therefore, Cecchet & Thoburn (2014) recommended further research on this topic should be conducted. This study validates the findings by Cecchet & Thoburn (2014), and their conclusion that catalyst experiences are some of the main factors why sex trafficking victims leave the trafficking situation.

The subject matter experts reported that internationally trafficked victims frequently get out of the trafficking situation because of law enforcement intervention, or because they are able to get help that one day they are allowed to leave to go to church or

the supermarket. Since internationally trafficked victims are generally not groomed by traffickers and do not share emotional bonds with the traffickers, they tend to be trafficked for a lesser amount of time. While events, such as a beating or illness may trigger internationally trafficked victims to become more determined to leave the trafficking situation sooner, it was not reported that catalyst experiences are necessarily trigger events for these victims as they were defrauded into this situation from the very beginning and never wanted to be in this situation in the first place.

A third sub-theme that emerged from *Leaving the Trafficking Situation* was *Resources*. The findings of this study show that the access to resources is a factor that enables female victims of sex trafficking to leave their situation. All 9 subject matter experts who participated in this study reported that the access to resources plays an important factor in how long victims of sex trafficking are in the trafficking situation. The subject matter experts reported that without an access to resources, it is almost impossible for female victims of sex trafficking to leave the situation because they usually have no place to go. They need a whole team of people to assist them in their journey from being victims of sex trafficking to becoming survivors of sex trafficking. Internationally trafficked victims an immigrant victims of sex trafficking who do not have legal status in the United States need a visa, a work authorization, as well as financial assistance during the time they wait for their visas and work authorizations, in addition to all the help domestically trafficked victims require. Housing assistance, medical assistance, help getting criminal records expunged or their names changed, help with substance abuse, and help finding employment are all resources victims must have access to in order to start a new life. Participants reported that if victims reach out and

they are presented with a way out of that life, they usually take it. The resources referred to in this study do not even include the psychological help these women need, but just refers to the basic resources that enable victims who are trapped in sex trafficking situations to leave.

Since there is not much existing literature on the role resources play in regard to whether victims of sex trafficking are able to leave the trafficking situation, this study fills a research gap by highlighting the importance of resources. Existing literature suggests that practitioners, such as nurses are in a unique position to help victims of sex trafficking when they seek medical attention due to a severe illness that intervenes with the traffickers' monetary gain. From there, if recognized as victims of human trafficking, nurses can refer the victims to practitioners who are able to help them with a way out of that life (Chesnay, 2013). However, it rarely occurs that a victim seeks mental health services independently while they are being trafficked due to fear or because they are not aware that they are victims of human trafficking. Oftentimes, arrests will put them in touch with counselors who can help them leave (Litam, 2017).

The findings of this study are consistent with the existing literature which suggests that it is challenging to connect victims of sex trafficking with resources. At the same time, this study fills a research gap that exists when it comes to the role resources play in the victims' ability to leave the trafficking situation. All 9 participants of this study reported that when presented with a way out of the trafficking situation, the victims will usually take the way out, suggesting that the access to resources is one of the main factors that enables victims of sex trafficking to leave the trafficking situation they are in. The main challenge for victims of sex trafficking is for them to first recognize that they

are indeed victims of sex trafficking, and that there are resources that exist and are available for them if they reach out. Also, overcoming the fear of reaching out contributes to the challenges they face leaving the trafficking situation they are in. Participant 9 reported that the National Human Trafficking Hotline is a way for victims to gain access to resources, such as for example, they may call the hotline if they come across the number if it is posted in the bathroom of a rest place or truck stop. These findings are consistent with the statistics reported by the Polaris Project (2020), in which out of 14,597 identified sex trafficking victims in 2019, 19% of the victims who were identified by the National Human Trafficking Hotline made the calls to the hotline personally. The findings of this study are also consistent with the Polaris Project's (2020) report, which states that victims of sex trafficking need to have an access to resources in order to exit the trafficking situation they are in. It becomes more difficult, and oftentimes nearly impossible for victims to exit that life without getting connected to resources.

Theme 4 - Healing from the Trafficking Experience

This fourth theme is considered one of the main themes that explores the resilience of female sex trafficking victims and also answers the research questions. *Healing from the Trafficking Experience* as a fourth theme surfaced from the data collected from all 9 subject matter experts, and this theme revealed 4 emerging sub-themes: *Counseling*, *Fellowship*, *Spirituality*, and *Helping Others*. Existing literature on human trafficking, and in particular sex trafficking indicates that victims need counseling in order to recover from the trafficking experience. However, existing research does not indicate how counseling female victims of sex trafficking directly relates to their resilience and ability to bounce back from the trafficking situation they experienced. The

existing literature indicates that social workers around the United States have received training to recognize and screen for victims of sex trafficking, which allows them to recognize them as victims when they come across victims (Chesnay, 2013).

However, a counselor's role may differ depending on whether a victim is currently trafficked or was a trafficking victim in the past. For the most part, victims seek mental health services due to court mandates for drug charges. An additional challenge for mental health counselors is the common mistrust among human trafficking victims and the ability of the counselor to build trust with human trafficking victims. The use of unconditional positive regard, empathy, and authenticity are essential for these practitioners to gain the victims' trust, which allows for them to develop safety plans for victims and share resources, such as to arrange for them to contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline (Litam, 2017).

However, the results of this study indicate that not all mental health counselors and social workers are equipped and even mentally prepared to deal with the extremely sad stories of sex trafficking victims. While the results of this study indicate that one on one counseling is essential in the healing process of female sex trafficking victims, counselors must also be mentally prepared for not only the sad stories of the victims and survivors, but also to deal with the behaviors that many of these victims and survivors display. Such behaviors are often manipulative behaviors which allow these women to survive while they are in the trafficking situation. Then after they get out of the trafficking situation, the victims must learn how to transform these behaviors that were survival skills during the time they were trafficked, and transform them into skills that help them in their new lives. Therefore, one on one counseling must be with practitioners

who are capable and ready to deal with victims of sex trafficking. Building trust with the victims is essential to help them in their recovery process. This researchers concludes that the findings of this study are consistent with the already existing literature on the importance of the practitioners' abilities and capabilities to work with this vulnerable population.

Fellowship as a sub-theme emerged from the data as the majority of practitioners reported that it is very helpful for victims to get in touch with organizations, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, or faith-based organizations. One participant specifically reported that the age group of the population she works with does not do well when they attend support groups. She caters to the underage female victim population, and the majority of the girls she works with have not reached their 21st birthday yet. Participant 8 reported that due to these girls' age, and since they are used to compete with each other, group sessions usually end up in competitions rather than serve their intended purpose. However, all other 8 practitioners reported that the victim populations they work with, which tend to be in their mid to late twenties or early thirties, benefit from joining support groups and organizations that offer some form of fellowship and in which they can make like-minded friends. Frequently, in such organizations they meet other female survivors of sex trafficking who can mentor them and inspire them to start a new life by showing them that they went through the same experience and are now living a different life. If they are addicted to drugs or alcohol, then a mentor who encourages them to stay away from drugs and alcohol is very helpful too. It is overall very beneficial for these victims and survivors to find access to a different environment, social outlet, and support, as they were oftentimes trafficked from the very neighborhoods they live in. Sometimes,

all their friends are from the trafficking environment or their friends are the ones who recruited them into trafficking. Therefore, finding a different social environment is essential in their journey towards healing from the trafficking experience. The findings of this study suggest that finding a different social outlet and making friends with like-minded people, even if they are from different walks of life, help victims not fall back into the trafficking environment. Existing literature on human trafficking suggests that some of the reasons why females are vulnerable to traffickers are oftentimes a history of abuse or neglect at home. Some of the American children who become human trafficking victims are runaways or are in the foster system; they lived with various foster families and have never been used to living in a stable family environment. Pimps and traffickers then use strategies in which they provide the victims with “pseudo families” or and guarantee them with a roof over their head (Mirfenderski, 2017). The findings of this study suggest that domestically trafficked females are co-dependent on the traffickers due to their vulnerabilities that developed in their childhood and their upbringing. Internationally trafficked victims may be co-dependent too, however, their dependencies tend to surround their unfamiliarity with the United States, and how the system in the United States works, rather than being emotionally dependent on the trafficker. The subject matter experts reported that the co-dependency that these females display then gets transferred onto the practitioners who help them exit that life. Therefore, this study concludes that organizations that offer fellowships and social outlets are beneficial for the victim populations because it provides them with the type of supportive environment that they benefit from in their recovery process.

Spirituality emerged as a third sub-theme throughout the semi-structured interviews, as all participants, except participant 7, who works with immigrant victims of trafficking reported that finding spirituality helps victims find guidance and allows them to make sense out of the trafficking experience. Participant 7 reported that she does not believe that spirituality would have prevented the victims she works with from getting trafficked, as they were defrauded into the situation. However, that does not mean that in the recovery process, they would not benefit from getting in touch with faith-based organizations. There are organizations, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, who also included spirituality into their 12-step program, however, they are not affiliated with one particular faith but rather with spiritual concepts. Participant 6 reported that the female victims she caters to and provides housing for are taught how to use meditation as a way to cope with their trafficking experience. It is one of the skills taught in her organization in addition to providing them with counseling. Participant 9 indicated that she noticed that in particular with victims from Mexico, getting in touch with spirituality helped them tremendously with coping from the experience of getting trafficked. The findings of this study suggest that finding spirituality, which does not necessarily refer to becoming religious, helps victims of sex trafficking find inner guidance in their lives. It can help them make sense out of their experience, and allows them to shape a new narrative about the traumatic experience they lived through. This new narrative about the trafficking experience provides them with the inner guidance they may have been missing when they grew up and became vulnerable to the trafficker. The new outlook about the trafficking they experienced provides them with emotional growth. Generally, finding spirituality also provides these women with something to fall back onto when they face adversity and

conflict in their lives later on. Instead of falling back into the life style, the commercial sex industry, or to substance abuse due to having to deal with stressors in their lives, spirituality provides them with something to turn to. These findings are in alignment with the findings by Nguyen et al. (2014), who explored how the implementation of spirituality into Herman's model of trauma recovery (1998), allows victims of human trafficking to recover from the traumatic experience they lived through.

Helping Others emerged throughout the semi-structured interviews with the subject matter experts, as the majority of them reported that the survivors they know who made a full recovery from the experience of getting trafficked all help other victims recover. Some of them founded non-profit groups themselves, and many have become leaders in the field who train practitioners how to work with human trafficking victims. In pertinent part, the subject matter experts reported that helping other victims recover is only possible for those survivors who have already healed to some a great extent themselves, have gone to counseling, and have been out of that life for some time. The subject matter experts reported that survivor mentors are a great way to inspire female victims of sex trafficking start a new life, which lead to the sub-theme *Inspiring Other Victims and Survivors*. When victims see other survivors who have turned their lives around, they see for themselves that it is indeed possible to recover and live a good life, perhaps go to school or work a regular job. While at first this is very challenging for these females due to a lack of particular job skills or education, this study suggests that there are many victims of sex trafficking or human trafficking in general, who are very ambitious when presented with the opportunity of getting an education. While there is no existing literature on how it helps survivors of human trafficking to help other victims of

human trafficking, there are several news articles, in which victims of human trafficking speak out about how they were trafficked, and how years later they founded their own non-profit groups or ministries. These survivors all dedicated their lives to helping other victims of human trafficking. For these women, it is very empowering to dedicate their lives to helping others. Not only does it provide them with a purpose and direction in their lives, but it allows them ultimately to make sense out of their own trafficking experience. Helping others victims not only triggers their resilience within them, but it allows them to turn their own experience into an experience they can use for the greater good of society and to find a higher purpose in life. The findings of this study are consistent with Spitzer's (1999) model of happiness, in which he indicates that the highest level of happiness is the kind of happiness that stems from living for a greater cause, or for a higher purpose. It is the most fulfilling form of happiness; therefore, it only makes sense that the subject matter experts reported that the survivors they know who made a full recovery all help other victims recover and devoted their lives to helping others. These findings fill a research gap by answering the research question about what triggers the victims' resilience, and whether there are factors that contribute to their ability to fully recover from the trafficking experience. While survivors must have healed to the degree that they are able to help other victims in the first place, helping others tends to trigger their full recovery and ability to bounce back from their own traumatic experience. By turning the trafficking experience into an experience that had a higher purpose, these women and girls can make sense out of it and they can replace being victims of sex trafficking with empowering themselves and turn their experience into an experience they can use towards the greater good of society.

Theme 5 - Substance Abuse

The fifth theme that emerged while analyzing the data that was collected through the semi-structured interviews with the subject matter experts was *Substance Abuse*. Substance abuse goes hand in hand with sex trafficking. Two sub-themes emerged; *Drugs and Alcohol*, as well as *Relapse and Falling back into that Life*. The shared collective experiences of the practitioners indicated that substance abuse often plays a part in the recruitment process in females who are domestically trafficked. While the practitioners reported that substance abuse and sex trafficking go hand in hand, the shared collective experience of the participants indicated that internationally trafficked females are less likely trafficked because they are addicted to drugs and alcohol, although drugs and alcohol may play a role and can be used to control the victims once they are in the trafficking situation. However, victims who are trafficked into the United States are also more hesitant to try drugs. While drugs may be used by traffickers to control their victims, with immigrant victims of sex trafficking it is easier for traffickers to just use their immigration status against them and instill fear of deportation in them than drug them.

The majority of the participants reported that females who are addicted to alcohol and drugs are at a higher risk of getting trafficked, and it makes it more difficult for those females to leave the trafficking situation, as their addiction is a problem in addition to the trafficking situation they are in. The findings of this study confirm that substance abuse is oftentimes used to lure the victims in. The subject matter experts reported that it is very common for the traffickers to do drugs with the victims prior to trafficking them. It is also common for pimps and traffickers to control their victims with drugs, as it makes it

easier for them to maintain control over the women and girls they are trafficking. Substance abuse weakens the victims' minds; therefore it is a popular tool used for control purposes by both, traffickers and pimps. Sometimes, victims who already had substance abuse issues prior to getting trafficked believe that they are in this situation because they are doing these services to get the drugs. They are not aware that they are victims of sex trafficking.

One subject matter expert reported that some of the girls she tended to were arrested and mandated to attend informative classes by the court, or go into drug rehabilitation centers. She further reported that this is where pimps preyed on them, knowing that they were easy prey due to their already existing substance abuse issues. The majority of the subject matter experts also reported that addiction to drugs and alcohol makes women and girls more likely targets for traffickers, as these women put themselves into dangerous situations where they can get grabbed and trafficked when they try to get drugs. Frequently, they work in the commercial sex industry because that is where they make the money to get drugs, and from there they get recruited by pimps or traffickers who notice their drug addiction and their vulnerabilities. The existing literature on substance abuse, drugs, and alcohol indicates that the findings of this study are in alignment with the already existing literature on the subject. According to Fine Collins (2011), there are two main business models' traffickers use to control their victims: Violence or drugs. Both business models suppress the victims. Finesse pimping occurs when traffickers use compassion, kindness, and psychological games to recruit and retain the victims. A trafficker may buy a victim gifts, give a victim money, clothes, shelter,

food, or drugs. By doing so the trafficker ensures the victim starts to feel obligated and indebted to the trafficker (Deshpande & Nour, 2013).

The sub-theme *Relapse and Falling back into that Life* surfaced when analyzing the data collected. The majority of the subject matter experts reported that most of the female sex trafficking victims who were domestically trafficked do drugs, have done drugs prior to getting trafficked, or started doing drugs while they were trafficked. The subject matter experts reported that female sex trafficking victims who were trafficked into the United States from another country are more hesitant to try drugs, and oftentimes never did drugs prior to getting trafficked. Since most domestically trafficked females have substance abuse issues by the time they are able to leave the trafficking situation, they also have to recover from being addicts, not only from the experience of getting trafficked and sexually exploited. The findings of this study conclude that as long as female sex trafficking survivors with substance abuse issues stay away from drugs and alcohol, they do not feel that they belong in the world of the commercial sex industry. However, the subject matter experts also reported that when survivors relapse and go back to drugs and alcohol, that is when they also return to work in the commercial sex industry, or return to their lives with a trafficker or pimp who caters to their addictions. It is also when they relapse, that they are at a higher risk of getting re-trafficked by a drug dealer, as 2 of the subject matter experts reported that some of their clients were kidnapped and sold over and over when they were trying to get drugs. These findings build onto the existing literature on the subject, which indicates that the victims start to depend on the traffickers for drugs or because they believe that without the traffickers they do not stand a chance in life. Whether it is because their self-esteem has become so

low that they started believing they need the trafficker, have nowhere else to go, or because they depend on the trafficker who is providing them with the lifestyle or drugs they feel they need (Fine Collins, 2011). The subject matter experts reported that victims frequently go back to the traffickers when drugs or an emotional bond play a factor. However, these factors mostly play a role in domestically trafficked victims, as the subject matter experts reported that they have not yet come across internationally trafficked victims who want to return to their traffickers or to working in prostitution. Several subject matter experts reported that they came across internationally trafficked victims who considered going back to exotic dancing since the money they can make with exotic dancing allows them to support their families in their native countries while not having to prostitute themselves.

The findings of this study expand on the already existing literature on female sex trafficking victims and their struggles in their journey towards healing from getting trafficked and their recovery from substance abuse.

Limitations

It did not appear to the researcher, that the participants had any particular biases when answering the research questions, however, one limitation of the study is that most of the participants were each working with different victim populations within the female victim population. In particular, one participant works exclusively with immigrant victims of human trafficking. Three participants work with female victims of sex trafficking who suffer from substance abuse problems, and one practitioner works mainly with victims who are underage and got incarcerated. One practitioner works with domestically trafficked victims who were arrested and oftentimes homeless, and the

remaining 3 participants work with a variety of female victims of sex trafficking. By asking a limited amount of follow up questions in addition to following the interview protocol, the researcher undertook efforts to collect the most insightful data and extract the true experiences of the subject matter experts beyond any superficial responses.

Another limitation of the study was that only one participant chose FaceTime as a method of participating in the interview process, while the remaining 8 participants chose to get interviewed via telephone. Therefore, the researcher was limited to analyze auditory data, body language and facial expressions were excluded, which could have provided more clues into the lived experiences of the participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

The data analysis of this study concluded that there are some areas of practice that should be further researched, as the subject matter experts as well as anyone else who comes into contact with female sex trafficking victims would greatly benefit from those. The following areas of future research were identified:

Coping mechanisms and coping strategies of sex trafficking victims is an area that should be further researched, as the majority of the participants reported that the victims and survivors they work with have very unhealthy and uncontrollable ways of coping with their experience. Many practitioners reported that the females they work with disassociate on command, or are unable to talk about their experience without experiencing extreme distress. One practitioner reported that a one of his clients goes into seizures when trying to talk about her experience of getting trafficked and sexually exploited.

Further, the benefit of survivors sharing their story and the direct correlation of how the sharing of their story would benefit them in their own healing process should be explored in future research. One participant reported that she had about 5 survivors who expressed interest in coming forward and telling their own story for the purpose of this study, or any future research conducted on the topic of human trafficking. However, while the initial intend of the researcher was to interview the victim populations directly, it would have been a very lengthy, if not impossible process for the researcher to gain approval from Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board due to the nature and sensitivity of the study. Therefore, after a reading the first draft of the study, the researcher's chair recommended for the researcher to find a way to gather the data without having direct contact with the victim populations. Due to having collected the data through the practitioners who work with the victim populations, one of this researcher's recommendation for future research is to allow victims and survivors of human trafficking tell their own story. While they may not initially be forthcoming and ready to share their story, after some time of initial healing, sharing their story may be beneficial for their own recovery process, and at the same time these stories could benefit society and with that serve a greater purpose. This aspect could be explored in connection to the findings of this study, which suggests that for survivors to find a higher purpose in life and helping other victims and survivors, helps with their own healing process and contributes to their own resilience.

Another recommendation for future research is to conduct a quantitative research study about the resilience in female sex trafficking victims, as with the quantitative methodology, the results could be expanded to represent a larger population.

Individual Methodology – A Lack of Conflict Resolution Skills and a Lack of Purpose

All 9 subject matter experts reported that the victims and survivors they worked with and are working with have many similarities in common, such as that they all trusted the wrong people to begin with. The trafficker was able to spot their vulnerabilities and use them for his or her own personal gain. Whether the vulnerabilities were of economic nature, or because the victims were already victims of some form other abuse prior to becoming sex trafficking victims, the vulnerabilities they have ended up making them prey for traffickers who used their vulnerabilities against them. Most of the practitioners reported that coping with the experience of getting trafficked is very difficult for the victims, and oftentimes they go back to the trafficking situation. This happens in particularly when these women have drug addiction problems and relapse, or when they share an emotional bond with the trafficker. If they are drug addicts, having to deal with stressors in their lives may be triggers for relapses. Then when they relapse they tend to return to working in the commercial sex industry to make money to get drugs, or they return to their pimps who provides them with drugs. The majority of practitioners reported that the victims they work with suffer from PTSD, and are able to disassociate on command. Due to their lack of conflict resolution skills as well as their lack of coping skills which they desperately need when they have to deal with conflict and stressors in their lives, they oftentimes relapse and turn to unhealthy coping strategies. Then they put themselves into dangerous situations all over again in an effort to get drugs, or they experience a moment of emotional weakness and return to their lives with a pimp. Like with all drug abusers who are trying to remain sober, dealing with stressors increases

their likelihood for relapses. It is not different with female sex trafficking victims who have an emotional bond to the trafficker. When they have to deal with stressors, and the pimp or trafficker calls them every day and tells them how much he loves them, they oftentimes go back. An inability to effectively deal with stressors and conflict weakens the victim's willpower and increases the likelihood of a victim to return to that life.

It would help these women and girls to learn how to successfully resolve conflict and deal with stressors in their lives by learning conflict resolution strategies. Typical conflict resolution skills that should be taught are emotional self-awareness and self-regulation, which are only possible through gaining consciousness about one's own needs and behaviors (Freud, 1923). Additionally, by gaining self-awareness and the ability to self-regulate, these females are automatically able to also improve their overall social awareness and manage their relationships in a more beneficial way. Other important aspects of conflict resolution skills are the ability to learn how to listen and properly communicate, problem solve and negotiate if needed. Ideally, the model of emotional intelligence should be incorporated into recovery programs for victims and survivors of human trafficking. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to understanding one's emotions as well as understanding other peoples' emotions, which in return results in becoming an overall more successful person (Sewell, 2011). According to Bar-On (1997), emotional intelligence consists of 5 realms: The intrapersonal realm, the interpersonal realm, the adaptability realm, the stress management realm, and the general mood realm. While the intrapersonal realm refers to the ability to be in touch with one's own emotions through emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, self-regard, and self-actualization, the interpersonal realm refers to the ability to detect other

peoples' emotions, and act accordingly by being able to feel empathy, show societal responsibility, as well as maintain relationships with others. The adaptability realm refers to the ability to problem solve and is affiliated with flexibility and reality testing. The stress management realm is one of the most important realms for survivors of human trafficking as it refers to the ability to tolerate stress and control impulses. Survivors must learn how to deal with stress without losing control, falling apart, or caving in. The fifth and last realm as indicated by Bar-On (1997), is the general mood realm. This realm depends on how well one is able to perform in the other realms; therefore, this realm is the direct result of the ability to manage the other realms. In order to become a successful, well-balanced person who is able to deal with adversity and its impacts whether it be personally, professionally, or relationally, survivors of human trafficking should be taught emotional intelligence within their recovery programs.

Recovery programs that teach these females conflict resolution skills, such as emotional intelligence, as well as combine those with finding a purpose in life may be very beneficial for their recovery process. Victims generally tend to lack a purpose in life, and their self-esteem is low prior to the trafficking, and even lower once they experienced the trafficking and the sexual exploitation. Learning how to effectively cope with conflict and finding a purpose in life, whether through helping others or through finding spirituality would positively influence these women and girls in their recovery process and help with their resilience. Once these sex trafficking survivors learned how to effectively work through difficult situations in their lives, and perhaps have something else to fall back onto, such as spirituality, or their newly found purpose in life, the

chances of getting re-trafficked, relapsing to drugs and alcohol, or returning to a life with a pimp decrease.

Most of the subject matter experts expressed that they observed those survivors who made a full recovery from the trafficking experience are helping other victims of human trafficking. The majority of the subject matter experts reported that these survivors are all leaders in the field, who teach practitioners how to work with victims of human trafficking. They also oftentimes founded non-profit organizations, which help victims of human trafficking. These survivors also frequently help lawmakers by providing guidance in regard to writing bills that combat human trafficking and benefit victims of human trafficking. These findings are in line with the Four Levels of Happiness theory by Spitzer (1999), in which when paired with Sigmund Freud's Model of the Human Psyche (1923), humans search for the ultimate happiness in life, which is not only a balance between level 1, 2, and 3 of happiness, but it is considered finding one's purpose in life, which is greater than the individual itself, and a connection to the universe at large. This type of happiness is only achievable through finding spirituality or finding a greater purpose than oneself in life; it is paired with the super-ego as indicated in Freud's model of the Human Psyche (1923). This explains why some female survivors of sex trafficking, after a lengthy and difficult recovery decide to devote their lives to helping other victims of human trafficking or making contributions to the field. Not only do they help other victims and inspire them to change their lives, but it also helps with their own ultimate healing from the trafficking experience. While healing does take place, these female victims of human trafficking will always have to live with having made this traumatic experience, however, they are able to transform this traumatic experience into

an experience with a higher purpose. However, not all female sex trafficking victims are able to recover to this degree and achieve this level of recovery and healing that allows them to help others. Also, since recovery and assistance programs are limited in duration, subject matter experts do not always get to witness every survivor's full recovery.

Contributions to the Field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution

This study highlights the importance of incorporating conflict resolution skills into recovery programs for female sex trafficking victims and survivors, but also into the recovery programs of anyone who is battling drug and alcohol addiction in addition to having been trafficked and exploited in the commercial sex industry. It appears that the victims' inability to deal with stressors in their daily lives increase their chances to get re-trafficked, return back to working in the commercial sex industry, or to their lives with a pimp or trafficker. Dealing with difficulties and stressors can trigger a relapse to drugs and alcohol, or a girl to go get weak minded and return to the trafficker if an emotional bond exists. Drug addiction is also a reason for victims to go back to working in the commercial sex industry because that is where they can make money for drugs. The inability of the victims to effectively deal with conflicts and stressors in their lives are factors that tempts them to return to that life instead of pushing through the difficulties while applying healthier coping strategies and methods.

The individual conflict the practitioners experienced when helping female victims recover from their sex trafficking experience indicates that also practitioners benefit from applying conflict resolution skills to dealing with female victims of sex trafficking, and to the challenges they face when working with this vulnerable population.

It is expected that the findings of this study further contribute to the field of conflict analysis and resolution by highlighting the type of conflict the subject matter experts experience when helping female sex trafficking victims recover from their trafficking experience. Additionally, the findings of this study also suggest practitioners would benefit from the implementation of conflict resolution strategies when working with this vulnerable population.

Personal Reflection of the Researcher

Overall, conducting this study was a pleasure and the highlight of my doctoral studies. The data collection portion of this dissertation fell onto the time of the Covid-19 lockdown in South Florida, which created a bit of a delay initially. However, what initially appeared like a major obstacle ended up working in my favor as all participants were working from home and appeared to have more time and flexibility to participate in my study.

The findings of this study were somewhat surprising to me as it never crossed my mind that finding a higher purpose in life, and helping others and society as a whole would promote healing, resilience, as well as overall happiness. However, after some time of research and reflection, I feel that the results only make sense and I started to notice this phenomenon does not only occur among female victims and survivors of sex trafficking, but also among victims and survivors of other crimes, as well as former drug addicts who turned their lives around and now help other addicts recover from their addictions. Both, participant 1 and 2 are former addicts who devoted their lives to helping other addicts recover from their addictions.

In the future, and after some time out from working on this doctoral degree, I am hoping to either work with a non-profit organization and conduct further research in this field, or I will create my own non-profit organization which will focus on conducting further research in the field of human trafficking.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the resilience in female sex trafficking victims, and to identify which factors influence the victims and survivors' resilience and ability to recover from the experience of getting trafficked and exploited in the commercial sex industry. In addition, the researcher explored how the participants perceived conflict when working with female sex trafficking victims. The 9 subject matter experts who participated in the study demonstrated how their knowledge and experience was able to contribute to the research in the field of human trafficking. The data that was collected as a result led to the identification of the 5 key themes and the 19 correlated sub-themes that shed light onto the resilience in female sex trafficking victims, which answered the 4 research questions. The factors that keep female sex trafficking victims in their trafficking situation are always fear, whether it is fear about the consequences, no place to go, fear due to their immigration status, or a lack of resources. On the other hand, an access to resources enables female victims of sex trafficking to leave the trafficking situation they are in sooner. Also, the experience of a catalyst event, such as near death, facing jail, illness, a drug overdose, or pregnancy helps these females re-evaluate their situation and overcome their fear of leaving and starting a new life. The factors that contribute to the healing of female sex trafficking victims are counseling, fellowship, spirituality, and helping others. Finding spirituality revealed to be a factor

that allows for female victims of sex trafficking victims to make sense out of their trafficking situation, and provides them with something to fall back onto when they experience stressors in their lives. However, helping others revealed to be the factor that promotes resilience among female victims of sex trafficking by allowing these women to not only finding purpose in their own trafficking experience, but also by allowing them to devote their lives to helping other victims of sex trafficking.

This study filled a research gap in the field of human trafficking that was needed to gain an increased understanding and knowledge about the resilience in female sex trafficking victims. It is also the intent of this researcher to have the findings contribute to the field of conflict resolution. The researcher concluded that practitioners would benefit from implementing conflict resolution strategies into their approach with female sex trafficking victims, as well as teach the victims and survivors conflict resolution strategies in order to effectively deal with conflict and challenges as these arise throughout the victims' lives. By learning how to effectively deal with conflict, which may be triggers for victims to fall back into that life, the chances of getting re-trafficked and exploited in the commercial sex industry are mitigated.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Consent to Conduct Study



MEMORANDUM

To: Petra Torri
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

From: Cristina Garcia-Godoy, D.D.S., M.P.H., C.C.R.P.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Date: February 27, 2020

Subject: IRB Initial Approval Memo

TITLE: Exploring the Resilience in Sex Trafficking Victims– NSU IRB Protocol Number
2020-97

Dear Principal Investigator,

Your submission has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board under Expedited review procedures on February 26, 2020. You may proceed with your study.

Please Note: Stamped copies of all consent, assent, and recruiting materials indicating approval date must be used when recruiting and consenting or assenting participants.

Level of Review: Expedited

Type of Approval: Initial Approval

Expedited Review Category: Expedited Category 7

Level of Risk: Minimal Risk

Continuing Review: Continuing Review is due for this protocol on February 25, 2021. A continuing review (progress report) must be submitted one month prior to the continuing review date.

Page 1 of 2

Changes: Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation using the Amendment Form.

Post-Approval Monitoring: The IRB Office conducts post-approval review and monitoring of all studies involving human participants under the purview of the NSU IRB. The Post-Approval Monitor may randomly select any active study for a Not-for-Cause Evaluation.

Final Report: You are required to notify the IRB Office within 30 days of the conclusion of the research that the study has ended using the IRB Closing Report Form.

Your study was approved under the following criteria:

- ☐ Consent Participants according to criteria of 45 CFR 46.116 and 45 CFR 46.117

Translated Documents: No

Please retain this document in your IRB correspondence file.

CC: Ransford Edwards, Ph.D.

Dustin Berna, Ph.D.

Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Letters

NSU IRB APPROVED:
Approved: February 26, 2020
Expired: February 25, 2021
IRB#: 2020-97-Web

Email Script to recruit potential participants:

Hello,

I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Doctoral Program for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

I am emailing you because you have been identified to be a practitioner who works with sex trafficking victims. The phenomenological study I am conducting is exploring the resilience in sex trafficking victims. By conducting this research study, I am trying to understand the factors that contribute to the resilience in sex trafficking victims, in order to not only create public awareness about the problem, but also to fill a research gap, and share the findings with practitioners who work with sex trafficking victims.

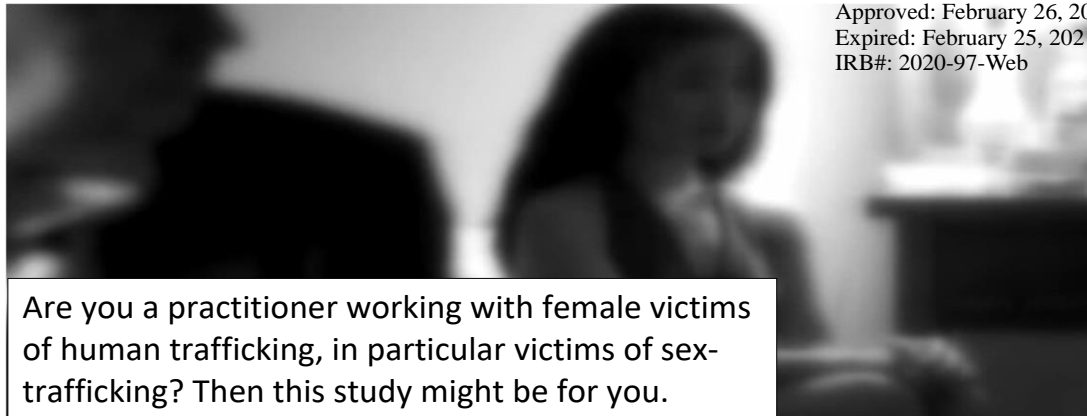
Please read the attached consent form, and get more insight into the nature of my study. In addition, please feel free to ask me questions about the study, or your participation in the study at any time.

You can allow yourself up to seven (7) days after receiving this email to make a decision about your participation in this research study, and once you decided to partake in this study, you are able to withdraw at any time. In order to partake in this study, you must be 21 years of age or older, and having been working with sex trafficking victims for a minimum of one (1) year.

If you decide to partake in this research study, please sign and date the consent form, and return it to me within seven (7) days after via email to pt265@mynsu.nova.edu.

Thank you!

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer



Study for practitioners who work with female sex-trafficking victims.

I am a Ph.D. candidate within the Conflict and Analysis Department/College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Nova Southeastern University. I am looking for practitioners who have been working with female sex trafficking victims for a minimum of one year. This study is trying to explore the resilience in female sex-trafficking victims, and determine the factors that contribute to this resilience, in order to raise public awareness about human trafficking, in particular the sex trafficking of females, and help practitioners who are likely to encounter sex trafficking victims due to their profession.

This research study tries to explore the resilience in sex trafficking victims, and the factors that contribute to this resilience, whether it be outside factors, or whether it is an internal process. By answering this research question, not only will it contribute to raise public awareness about the problem, but also it will help those deal with victims, who come into contact with sex trafficking victims due to their profession. Participants will be asked to read and sign the consent form, and email it back within 7 days of receiving it. They will then be called to schedule a phone interview that will take approximately 30 min of their time.

Participants will be asked to participate in one phone interview that will take approximately 30 min, but at a maximum one hour.

Participants will receive:

Upon completion of the interview, they will be mailed a \$25.00 Target gift card via postal mail.

Location:

All interviews will take place via phone, alternatively skype or FaceTime.

Are you eligible?

Must be 21 years or older.

Have worked with female sex trafficking victims for at least one year regardless of within what capacity within the United States.

Must not have been a victim of human trafficking or sex trafficking victim yourself.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Petra Torri via email: pt265@mynsu.nova.edu, or via telephone at: 786 525 5759.

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

NSU IRB APPROVED:
 Approved: February 26, 2020
 Expired: February 25, 2021
 IRB#: 2020-97-Web



General Informed Consent Form
NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled
Exploring the Resilience in Sex Trafficking Victims

Who is doing this research study?

College: Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

Principal Investigator: Petra Torri, B.S. in Psychology with minor in Criminal Justice, Nova Southeastern University, M.S. in National Security Affairs with concentration in Homeland Security, Nova Southeastern University

Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Dustin Berna, Ph.D. in Political Science, University of New Orleans, M.A. in Political Science, University of New Orleans, M.S. in History Education, Canisius College, B.A. in Political Science, Niagara University, B.A. in English Literature, Niagara University.

Co-Investigator(s): n/a

Site Information: Telephone, Skype, FaceTime

Funding: Unfunded

What is this study about?

This study tries to understand the resilience in sex trafficking victims. Resilience is the ability to bounce back, face, overcome, and change a situation. To be resilient means to be able to see a bad situation as a life lesson learned. Some victims of sex trafficking are born resilient, others become resilience over time. Unfortunately, some victims are unable to free themselves. These victims become traffickers or recruiters themselves as a way getting out of the situation they are in. This study tries to understand why some victims are able to break free from their trafficking situation, while other victims are not.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You have received a flyer about my study through an organization you work with, or because you know someone who forwarded you this flyer. To be a participant in this study, you must be 21 years or older. You must have been working with female sex-trafficking victims for a minimum of one year. Your work with the victims must have taken place within the United States. Also, due to your work, you must have gained first-hand knowledge about the lives of female sex-trafficking victims.

This study includes between seven and fifteen participants. More than one participant is not expected to be recruited from the same location.

NSU IRB APPROVED:
 Approved: February 26, 2020
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 IRB#: 2020-97-Web

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

Data collection will take place through interviews. The interviews will take place via phone, FaceTime, or Skype. The interviews are taking place with the principal investigator. The principal investigator is allowed to ask a limited amount of follow up questions to the answers you provide. You are welcome to ask questions at any time during the study. No information is asked from you that will identify you, or the victims you work(ed) with. Please do not share any identifiable information.

While I am happy to share the results of this study with you, the information you provide to me remains confidential. At no time are you asked to provide confidential information. Also, your identity will be kept confidential. No known risks are associated with the participation in this study. The researcher has no financial interest in this study. If you agree to participate in this study, you are one of between seven and fifteen participants. This study may be published in order to fill research gaps and to raise public awareness about the problem.

Please sign this consent form. Your signature means you are aware of the purpose of this study, and have been provided with the knowledge about the nature and the procedures. For your records, a copy of the signed consent form is provided to you.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to be in it. If you decide to leave the study or you do not want to continue being in the study, you do not get penalized. You will also not lose any services you have a right to get. If you choose to leave the study before it is over, any information about you that was collected **before** the date you leave the study is kept in the research records for 36 months. This information may be used as part of the research. The 36 months period starts at the time of the completion of the study.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available after you have joined the study, the information will be provided to you by the investigator. You can then decide whether you wish to remain in the study. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?

There is no guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefit from this study. We hope the information learned from this research study will benefit other people who experienced the same phenomenon.

Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?

After completion of the interview, you will be mailed a Target gift card in the amount of \$25.00 for your participation in this research study. The Target gift card will be mailed to you via postal mail.

Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for being in this research study.

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Will clinically relevant research results be shared with me?

Yes, clinically relevant research results will be shared with you. While the results of this study are relevant within clinical care, they are also relevant outside of clinical care. The results are important for practitioners, who treat victims for example for mental health. It is relevant for those practitioners to gain an inside into the factors that contribute to the resilience in the victims they treat. Then, they can specifically direct their care towards factors that contribute to the victims' resilience. The results are also relevant for practitioners who do not provide clinical care. The awareness of factors that contribute to the victims' resilience will allow them to implement those factors in their work. In return, this may help these victims' ability to overcome and bounce back from their experience.

Once I completed my dissertation, you will receive a copy of my study via email within seven days.

How will you keep my information private?

Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. All the information you provided to me is confidential, and private, and will be maintained in a safe, code-protected, fire-proof container. The data will be maintained for a period of 36 months (three years) from the end of this study. Afterwards, the data will be destroyed by shredding. This data will only be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution.

Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?

If you have questions now, feel free to ask us. If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

Primary contact:
 Petra Torri can be reached at 786 525 5759.

If primary is not available, contact:
 Dr. Dustin Berna can be reached at 954 319 1177.

Research Participants Rights

For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
 Nova Southeastern University
 (954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

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Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section

Voluntary Participation - You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you agree to participate in this research study, sign this section. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing this form.

SIGN THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:

- ☐ You have read the above information.
- ☐ Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research.

Adult Signature Section

I have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study.

 Printed Name of Participant

 Signature of Participant

 Date

 Printed Name of Person Obtaining
 Consent and Authorization

 Signature of Person Obtaining Consent &
 Authorization

 Date

Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

- Please tell me how many years have you worked with this population, which roles, and what is your educational background:
- How old are the majority of sex trafficking victims you are working with or have worked with in the past?
- How old were they when they were recruited to work in the commercial sex industry?
- Would you say drug addiction is a factor in their situation?
- Where were they approached while they worked in the commercial sex industry or were they recruited into working in the commercial sex industry?
- How did deception play into the recruitment? Were the victims lured into working into the commercial sex industry, or were they aware of the type of work they were expected to perform?
- If they were underage at the time they were recruited, do you know if the recruiter aware of their age at the time he/she recruited them?
- How long did they work in the commercial sex industry?
- Did some of the victims you work(ed) with ever recruit anyone else into the life of working in the commercial sex industry and into being trafficked for sexual exploitation?
- What places where they working at while they were working in the commercial sex industry?
- What type of sexual services did they perform?

- How many customers did they serve on average on a regular day?
- How long did it take most of the victims to leave that life on average?
- Around what age are most of the victims you work(ed) with when they left the commercial sex industry?
- Was there a particular reason why the victims you work(ed) with left the commercial sex industry or was it by chance because of third party intervention?
- Do you know if they ever thought about leaving the commercial sex industry prior to actually leaving that life?
- How long do you believe the sex trafficking survivors you work(ed) with think about leaving that life prior to acting and physically leaving?
- Are you aware of any particular experiences or reasons, like for example any catalyst experiences victims had prior to deciding that it was time to leave?
- Are you aware of any contributing factors that helped these victims leave the commercial sex industry and trafficking situation?
- Are you aware of any outside influence or factors that helped any of the victims you work(ed) with escape their trafficking situations?
- Do you know if any of the victims you work(ed) with are tempted to go back into that life, or do you believe that the majority of victims you worked with are moved on once they escaped and will not look back?
- Are you aware of any outside factors the victims you work(ed) with wished they had in their lives at the time they were trafficked because it would have likely helped them get help and leave that life sooner?

- Are you aware of any outside help, factors, or support that provided the victims you work(ed) with, with the necessary strength or the ability to cope with the experience of being trafficked and exploited in the commercial sex industry?
- What is the most challenging aspect you find in helping this vulnerable population recover from their experience?
- Is there anything in particular that you as a practitioner would like to share for this study or would like people who read this study to know?
- Do you think that if a victim had an inner guidance like spirituality or something they would have not ended up becoming victims?

Follow up questions as recommended by Moustakas (1994):

- How do you believe did experiencing sex trafficking affect the victims you work(ed) with in the long run?
- What changes do you associate in females who have been sex trafficking victims?
- What feelings do you know of were generated with this experience?
- Anything that would contribute to their resilience?
- Have you shared all that you find is significant in reference to the experiences of the female sex trafficking victims you work(ed) with?